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THE SUPERINTENDENT’S FEED:
AN ANALYSIS OF SUPERINTENDENTS’ ENGAGEMENT
IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON TWITTER

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Sciences
in the College of Education at the University of Kentucky

By

Todd M. Hurst

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Wayne Lewis, Professor of Education

2017

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

THE SUPERINTENDENT'S FEED: AN ANALYSIS OF SUPERINTENDENTS' ENGAGEMENT IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON TWITTER

The modern school superintendent fulfills a unique role in the American public education system. He or she is structurally empowered as the de facto head of the local educational system, thereby granted with a certain amount of trust and authority regarding educational issues. At the same time, the superintendent is, in most cases, an employee of a politically appointed school board. This construction creates a dynamic wherein the superintendent is both the leader of a highly structured, bureaucratic system, while at the same time an employee of a largely lay, often elected, group of citizens.

The position of the superintendent is highly informed by the role conceptualizations first posited by Callahan (1966). Callahan argued that there are four distinct normative roles that superintendents must fill: scholarly educational leader, business executive, educational statesman, and applied social scientist. In this study, I pay special attention to the role of educational statesman, which is alternatively referred to as political strategist by later scholars (Björk & Gurley, 2005; Brunner, Grogan, & Björk, 2002).

I have examined the role of political strategist as it has manifest on the social media platform Twitter. Twitter use has become a common practice among educational leaders for a variety of reasons, including the development of professional learning networks, communicating with stakeholders, and even engaging in policy discussions (Roth, 2016; Sauers & Richardson, 2015). To date, the intersection of social media use and political engagement by superintendents has been overlooked within the field, but the practice is common and has significant importance for the discipline.

I employed a two-phase analysis to explore this topic. First, I have utilized discourse analysis to better understand the constructive nature of the talk and text provided by superintendents on Twitter. The second phase of analysis employs a modified photo-elicitation methodology, wherein a subset of superintendents (7) were interviewed in a semi-structured format prompted by instances of their own political tweeting.

Findings from this study indicate that superintendents are using Twitter to discuss macro-political topics and employ sophisticated strategies in order to both project the image they want to be seen and to protect themselves from the political ramifications that might accompany such discourse. I believe that these findings have importance in the

way superintendents engage with their community stakeholders and indicate that there should be more attention paid to an evolving nature of communication for the position.

KEYWORDS: Superintendent, Politics, Educational Leadership, Twitter, Discourse

Todd Hurst

4/14/2017

THE SUPERINTENDENT'S FEED:
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IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON TWITTER

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To Jaymie, Harper, and Rhys

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Finally, thank you to all of the superintendents who were willing to discuss their use of Twitter with me. I am awed by the task and responsibility ahead of all superintendents and I hope that this study might provide insight in how as a field, we can better prepare and support future leaders within our schools.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The modern school superintendent fulfills a unique role in the U.S. public education system. He or she is structurally empowered as the de facto head of the local educational system, thereby granted with a certain amount of trust and authority regarding educational issues. At the same time, the superintendent is, in most cases, an employee of a politically appointed school board. This relationship creates a peculiar dynamic wherein the superintendent is both the leader of a highly structured, bureaucratic system, while at the same time an employee of a largely lay, often elected, group of citizens.

Superintendents must navigate this complex terrain while being cognizant of the political ramifications associated with their positions. At the same time, many school superintendents have begun to engage in Twitter as a tool to communicate with colleagues and to promote their districts (Roth, 2016). Their engagement on Twitter spans a variety of topics, including personal promotion, teaching and learning, announcements, leadership practice, and, most intriguing to me, educational policies (Cho, 2013). It is this intersection of the superintendency, politics, and technology that particularly interests me and has formed the basis for this study.

Through this study, I have sought to examine the evolving political nature of the superintendency by analyzing the discursive practices of superintendents on Twitter. I employed a two-phase analysis utilizing both discourse analysis and discourse-elicitation methodology to examine the nature of online macro-political discourse by superintendents. Through an inductive analysis of political tweets, I sought to better

understand the textual nature of superintendents' discourse on political topics online. I then grounded that knowledge in semi-structured interviews regarding discursive practice with superintendents in their own words. Through this analysis, I believe I have shed light upon an emerging discursive practice and the important dynamic of macro-political discourse within the superintendency.

In this introductory chapter I will establish the context and rationale for the development of this study. I will provide a background to the problem at hand before explaining my approach to politics and social media. I will then present the three research questions that comprise the focus of this study. Finally, I will detail the significance and provide the limitations and assumptions inherent to this study.

Background of the Problem

The common school movement of the mid-1800s not only brought the concept of free and public education for all, but also formalized the institution of public education. At the heart of this formalization was the establishment of local control of educational institutions through the creation of local boards of education. Rather quickly, however, the systematization of public schooling required school systems to grow increasingly complex in order to meet the needs of more students and the growing field of professional educators. The boards of education, comprised largely of non-educators, began to rely upon superintendents to manage the details of the district, which was too burdensome for the part-time, elected school board (Cuban, 1976).

The first district superintendents were hired in the 1830s to support the district administration on behalf of local school boards (Kowalski, 2006). Quickly, other school districts across the country began hiring superintendents and the position became a norm

for educational institutions before the end of the century. Over the course of the last century, the position has been one of evolution and growing complexity. Superintendents must not only serve as an employee of the school board, but also fulfill a variety of roles, including: head instructional leader, business manager, director of human resources, and, increasingly, political strategist. The complexity of modern educational systems requires leaders to possess a vast array of skills and dispositions to serve the district well (Browne-Ferrigno & Glass, 2005).

The position of superintendent did not originate with such diverse responsibilities. The first superintendents were considered to be little more than clerks to the board of education, providing staffing to increasingly complex organizations. Yet, from the very first leaders appointed to the role, “conflict was in the DNA of the superintendency” (Cuban, 1985, p. 28). The power and leadership that superintendents began to amass challenged the political powers that controlled local government (Kowalski, 2006).

In response, over the last 100 years, the position of superintendent has been forced to evolve alongside the needs of the school. In analyzing and seeking to understand this evolution, scholars have categorized the various roles superintendents fulfill and have broken their practice down into normative role conceptualizations.

For the purpose of this study, I have chosen to utilize Callahan’s (1966) conceptualizations of the superintendency as a framework upon which to build. This is because Callahan provided one of the first systematic analyses of the roles of the superintendent as it has evolved through time and in relation to societal and cultural evolutions. In his analysis, Callahan identified four distinct roles that superintendents fulfill in their work: teacher scholar, business leader, educational statesman, and applied

social scientist. Many others have adapted or challenged these conceptualizations, including Boyd (1974), Brunner et al. (2002), Björk and Keedy (2001), and Kowalski (2005). The uniting feature of these studies, however, is the acceptance of the fact that the superintendency is constituted by finite, normative roles that require different skills and adeptness to understand how and when to apply those skills.

The word role is important in terms of the ontological and methodological considerations that guided this study. I hold a social constructionist perspective that posits knowledge is created and made real through the interaction of individuals and becomes manifest primarily through linguistic resources (Burr, 2003). This orientation and the inherent assumptions present in my methodological choices led me to role theory as a means of understanding how individuals fulfill the cultural expectations for the positions they serve (Biddle, 1979). I have sought to operationalize role theory and Callahan's (1966) role conceptualizations as a conceptual framework to understand superintendent practice, particularly as it relates to their political engagement.

As such, I have conceptualized that the superintendency is a position that is characterized by specific roles that are informed by social expectations. At different times throughout history different roles have been prioritized. Furthermore, different audiences necessitate the performance of distinctive roles as well. For instance, the manner in which a superintendent discusses educational issues with a politician will be different than how he or she discusses the same issue with parents, teachers, board members, or community partners. For each of these audiences, the superintendent understands the cultural and audience expectations and performs to those expectations. This holds importance for the study at hand because the use of social media has significant implications for the

targeting of audiences. In addition, the increased politicization educational issues and the ubiquity of social media puts the modern superintendent in a difficult position of fulfilling their roles as political strategists in a very public and permanent manner. In the following section I will explicate the topic of politics and define its usage throughout this study.

Politics

This study takes a focus on one particular role conceptualization regarding the political nature of the superintendency. This role, referred to as educational statesman by Callahan (1966) or political strategist by Björk and Keedy (2001), manifests as the superintendent manages internal and external political forces acting upon the school. As education has become increasingly politicized, such forces have grown at an exponential rate. As Grogan (2000) stated, “ambiguous messages from a variety of publics force the superintendent to be both a politically statute entrepreneur and an expert educator” (p. 117).

At its core, politics is about “who gets what, when, and how” (Blase & Blase, 2002, p. 7). While useful in providing a guiding principle to a complex topic, such a broad definition must be delimited for the purposes of this study. Therefore, I looked to the literature regarding politics in education as a means of framing my use of the term.

Education has become an everyday topic within U.S. political institutions. Everything from school funding and student choice to national standards and global educational competitiveness has become fodder for politicians to debate on the floor of state and the U.S. legislatures. It is imperative that superintendents understand the nature of these political dynamics in order to position their districts for success. Politics is the

new game that superintendents must play in order to achieve their goals (Howlett, 1993). In a world where educational issues are political issues, the superintendent, as the leader of the educational system must also become a politician of sorts.

Iannaccone (1975) recognized a distinction between the type of politics that exists within the school among various individuals within the system and that which exists outside of the schoolhouse between the school and the community. He came to refer to this internal political dynamic as micro-political. The political realities that confront a school from the outside, therefore, he categorized as macro-political. Blase and Blase (2002) further refined the term macro-political to “typically refer to the school’s external relationships and environments at the local, state, and national levels and the interactions of public and private organizations within, between and among levels” (p. 7). It is this definition of macro-political that most accurately captures the essence of political utilized throughout this study.

The idea of educational leaders being engaged in political issues has not always been an accepted norm. Historically, there has been an unspoken understanding that education should be inherently apolitical so as not to sully the virtue of the educational endeavor with the unsavory nature of party politics (Kirst & Wirt, 1997). The vestiges of this apolitical myth still persist with regard to the public education system and the position of the superintendency. In truth, however, politics have been and still remain integral to democratic traditions. The current quest for school reform has encouraged superintendents to engage in political discourse related to the realities associated with pursuing school improvement at the local district level (Peterson & Kowalski, 2005).

In this study, I sought to better understand how school superintendents engage in macro-political dialogue through social media tools. That is, I was keenly interested in better understanding how superintendents discuss party politics, state and national educational policy, and various elected officials on the social media platform Twitter.

Superintendents do not have the luxury of ignoring the politics inherent in their positions. Shifting cultural norms and an increasing politicization of the educational system have forced superintendents to become active political players. Everything from the content standards to public school financing is fodder for political dialogue playing out at the local, state, and even national level. In response, superintendents must develop coalitions among broad stakeholders within their communities regarding policies and political topics inside and outside of the schoolhouse. As Edward's (2006) noted, due to the modern landscape of educational politics, superintendents are "no longer able to choose whether or not to get involved in the political arena, (they) must assess the politics of their districts and determine how to best work within it" (p. 138).

Twitter

Cox and McLeod (2014) argued that, like politics, social media is no longer an optional practice for school superintendents. The social media platform Twitter has firmly established a presence within the realm of educational leadership over the course of the last decade. Many scholars have explored the power of social media as a tool for developing professional learning networks and collaborative communities (Cho, 2013; Couros & Jarrett, 2012; Sauers & Richardson, 2015). In a recent study of school superintendents, Roth (2016) found that approximately 17% of current superintendents across the United States had a Twitter account in which they identify themselves as a

superintendent. This number will only continue to grow as the platform reaches more participants and more tech-savvy superintendents enter the field.

Ten years ago Twitter was first created as a text messaging communications platform. What was once a relatively small technology start-up company has become one of the largest social sites on the internet. Twitter has come to not only be a platform for communication and sharing, but it has also had profound political ramifications. From the protests associated with the Arab Spring (Marzouki & Oullier, 2012; Richardson & Brantmeier, 2012) to the 2016 election (Bort, 2016), Twitter has become fundamental to politics in our modern world. Therefore, as it is an expectation that superintendents understand and engage in the complex political systems surround the educational system, it is not surprising to encounter them finding a voice and various communities with which to engage on Twitter.

The genesis for this study was a curious experience while exploring Twitter one afternoon. I noticed a local superintendent commented on a political issue that was causing much controversy in my state. This immediately piqued my interest because I wondered whether stakeholders with that superintendent's community were aware or interested in the dialogue. Furthermore, the very nature of the interaction was contradictory to my experience with superintendents, which I knew as politically astute actors who moderated their comments so as not to alienate stakeholders who might disagree, but fought hard for their own beliefs through other appropriate and effective avenues.

Statement of the Problem

It is the juncture of the political nature of the superintendency with the growth of social media that has brought forth new issues for superintendents. As superintendents utilize Twitter as a tool for communicating with various stakeholders on a variety of topics, they must use caution regarding politically sensitive issues that could present negative repercussions with their board, community, or state and local officials. To date, the scholarly community has not studied this emerging form of political discourse from the superintendency and how it may influence the evolving roles of the position.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the phenomenon associated with superintendents engaging in political discourse on Twitter so that we may better understand the evolution of superintendency. To accomplish this, I developed three distinct research questions. I also proposed a two-phase analysis that seeks to analyze the phenomenon of political discourse on Twitter by superintendents and then ground that knowledge through interviews with practitioners.

Research Questions

I brought a qualitative orientation to this study and sought to better understand the practice of superintendent macro-political discourse through an inductive analysis of practice and semi-structured interviews. I set forth three research questions to guide this inquiry:

- 1) Do superintendents engage in macro-political discourse on Twitter?
- 2) What is the discursive nature of superintendents' macro-political discourse on Twitter?

3) How do superintendents characterize their own Twitter use for macro-political engagement?

Research question one was postulated because, while I have informally observed what I consider to be macro-political discourse by superintendents on Twitter, there have been no studies to date that have specifically examined this phenomenon. Therefore, it provided a logical starting point to focus my inquiry. Research question two shifted my focus of analysis to the nature of the macro-political discourse itself. In particular, I was interested in the discursive strategies and the constructive nature of their engagement in macro-political discourse on Twitter. To address questions one and two, I employed discourse analysis principles, drawing upon the discursive psychology approach of Jonathan Potter, Margaret Wetherell, and Derek Edwards (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1992). This methodological choice requires that the unit of study focus on text and imagery itself rather than the individuals behind the discourse. In other words, the first phase of my analysis was solely concerned with the manifestation of macro-political discourse and an analysis of what the text accomplishes. Such an approach is important because it assumes that the discourse of superintendents on social media is constructive in nature.

While the first phase of analysis holds potential for examining the phenomenon associated with macro-political discourse of superintendents online, I was also interested in grounding these theoretical assumptions in the perspectives of practicing superintendents. Research question three was an attempt to achieve this goal through better understanding how superintendents speak about their own macro-political engagement in their own words. I looked to the methodological approach of photo-

elicitation methodology as a potential method to answer this question. Photo-elicitation methodology is a qualitative approach that seeks to understand a phenomenon by engaging in semi-structured interviews that are prompted through the use of photographic artifacts (Harper, 2002). For this study, I have adapted this approach by changing the dialogic prompt to a series of tweets rather than photographs. I have termed this methodological variant *discourse elicitation methodology*.

Professional Significance

The superintendency is perhaps the most complex position within traditional U.S. schools. Superintendents are expected to be an educational leader, monitor and allocate resources effectively within the district, engage local stakeholders, and observe and influence political developments at the state and national level. Accomplishing these varied goals requires broad skillsets and an understanding of best practices and resources available. This study provides insight into a relatively small, but very complicated aspect of practice. That is, how superintendents are leveraging Twitter as a resource to engage in macro-political discourse.

The professional significance of this study lies in the possibility to do three things. First, it will serve to better understand how superintendents are currently engaging in macro-political discourse on Twitter and may highlight promising strategies and/or potential areas for concern for superintendents moving forward.

A second potential significance lies in the possibility to further the field's current understanding of superintendent roles in the age of social media. While the uptake of social technologies is not ubiquitous within the leadership ranks of K-12 schools, it is growing rapidly and leaders are using social media for varied and intriguing purposes.

While it is beyond the scope of this study to begin to define the development of any new roles that may be emerging in light of this trend, I believe it does indicate that there is an evolution of practice that has significant implications for the practice of the superintendency.

Finally, this study has the potential to extend both of the methodologies employed. Discursive psychology has grown in popularity recently and has been used in multiple educational studies. However, there are very few studies applying any form of discourse analysis to Twitter and certainly no studies applying it to analyze political tweets from within the ranks of school leadership. My utilization of discourse elicitation is an extension to the current understanding of photo-elicitation methodology. As more of human existence is catalogued in discursive practice online, having a methodological tool to frame discussions of past practice will prove very helpful. I believe utilizing photograph-like instances of past discourse is a novel approach and shows promise as an emergent methodology.

Assumptions and Limitations

Discourse analysis as a methodology is grounded in a personal philosophical positioning. As such, others may interpret discursive practices or implications differently than I. Therefore, I welcome various perspectives on the subject at hand in order to more fully understand the nature of political dialogue by superintendents on Twitter. I believe as social media becomes more ubiquitous and superintendents turn to it as a tool for communicating with parents, teachers, students, and community members, it will continue to be important to fully understand how their usage constructs their identities and roles as modern school superintendents.

The study at hand examines the tweets of a relatively small sample of school superintendents on Twitter. The intent was not to define practice, but to examine emerging discursive practices. Therefore, if expanded to a broader dataset at a different point in time, there may be alternative results. Additionally, I decided to conduct my analysis on a dataset from the academic year 2014-2015. This decision was made for two reasons: (a) because I did not want the findings to be influenced by the increased political discourse associated with the presidential election of 2016 and (b) it allowed for some physical space between the political issues being discussed in the dataset and the issues that confront superintendents today.

Finally, I came to this study as an individual who previously worked with superintendents within a policy subsystem in Indiana. In that role, I frequently worked with superintendents to interpret state policy and to strategically position their districts to take advantage of policy waivers. As such, I have developed opinions regarding the nature of the superintendency and its role in macro-political topics, which has undoubtedly influenced my approach to this study.

Definition of Key Terms

For the purpose of this study, some key terms need to be operationalized.

Discourse Analysis: An analytical approach to practice that examines the constructive nature of language as the primary unit of analysis (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Discursive Psychology: A form of discourse analysis that emerged in response to cognitive psychology. Discursive psychology seeks to understand the ways in which individuals construct meaning and representations through discursive practice (Potter & Wetherell, 1992).

Macro-political: Macro-political refers to political topics or discourses that encompass topics relating to and influenced by the external aspects of the school.

Photo-elicitation Methodology: A qualitative methodological approach that employs photographs as catalysts for semi-structured interviews (Harper, 2002).

Role Theory: A theoretical orientation to the production of behaviors that posits individuals, like actors on a stage, perform to social expectations and seek the approval of the audience (Biddle, 1979).

Superintendency: Throughout this study the term superintendent and the superintendency has been used specifically in reference to the educational leader of a local public school district in the United States.

Twitter: A public social media platform that allows user to connect with individuals and broadcast messages in short, 140 character *tweets* (Twitter, 2015).

Conclusion

In this study, I have chosen to analyze an emergent area of practice within the superintendency. I believe I have brought forth new findings and questions regarding superintendents' macro-political engagement on Twitter. In the next chapter, I will present an overview of the scholarship on the superintendency, paying attention to the role of politics in the superintendency. I will describe current scholarship on Twitter and its application in educational settings. Finally, I will discuss the theoretical orientation guiding this study and present a conceptual framework used to inform my understanding of superintendent role fulfillment.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This evolution of the position of superintendent has paralleled larger political and societal shifts that exerted new and competing forces upon school districts. Today, in many districts the superintendent is looked to as the public face of the school district and is expected to fill many and varied roles within complex and uncertain political environments.

The manner in which superintendents communicate has evolved along with the position (Callahan, 1966). The 21st century superintendent leads the school district in a technology-rich environment that enables constant communication with a broad array of stakeholders. As schools wrestle with the realities posed by the information revolution, school leaders must not only situate learning and leadership within a technologically-rich environment but also must realize how the affordances of technology impact their own communicative process and interactions with community stakeholders (Kowalski, 2005).

In this chapter, I will frame my approach to this study through a review of the scholarly literature regarding the superintendency, politics, and Twitter. I will begin by outlining the evolution of the superintendency and its related impact on the role conceptualizations associated with the position. In this, I will give particular attention to the political nature of the superintendency. I will then provide an overview of the research regarding social media and Twitter, both as it exists broadly within the field of educational leadership and more specifically as it relates to the superintendency. Finally, I will expand upon the theoretical and conceptual frameworks used to guide this study.

The Superintendency

The position of school superintendent has been one of change over nearly two centuries. A position that first emerged as a clerical position in support of local boards of education has now come to be seen as the “top-level administrator” in local education, making “policy recommendations ensur(ing) policy enforcement, and provid(ing) leadership and management for the day-to-day operations of the district” (Fusarelli & Petersen, 2014, p. 70). The process of this evolution has been punctuated by societal shifts and changing perceptions regarding the role of education in our modern society, impacting not only superintendent practice, but how the position is perceived by external stakeholders.

While the first formal public schools in the United States were created in the mid-1600s, the position of school superintendent would not be created for nearly 200 more years (Sharp & Walter, 2004). In that intervening time, the United States developed a particular approach to education built upon American principles of federalism. Specifically, autonomy in matters of education became focused on the very local, community level, outside the purview of state. While in practice local autonomy was adhered to, as cities and populations began to grow and school districts served larger numbers of students, community leaders turned to locally established boards of education to govern educational issues (Land, 2002). This practice was formalized across many states as issues and concerns regarding equity and quality became issues for state politicians. In order to rein in local control, state governments began to develop a system of local board governances, creating a multiple elected school boards to oversee local

educational matters (Kowalski, 2006). This formalization of school governance effectively established local school boards extensions of the state government.

Initially, school boards were composed of local leaders, primarily businessmen, who maintained oversight of educational policies and objectives. These lay officials had very little in the way of educational expertise or pedagogical training, but their involvement and the influence garnered through their involvement in the district was politically advantageous (Boyd, 1974; Land, 2002). This lack of knowledge related to educational issues specifically led to the initial establishment of the role of superintendent.

By most accounts, school boards in Buffalo, New York and Louisville, Kentucky hired the first superintendents in 1837 (Kowalski, 2005; Sharp & Walter, 2004). The position of superintendent was initially developed to function as a clerk to the school board (Brunner et al., 2002; Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Kowalski, 2006). However, from its very beginnings, the role of the superintendency was mired in politics. Early school board members saw their relation to the district as a politically advantageous resource (Land, 2002). Therefore, they were leery of the power and prestige that might be accumulated through the position of superintendent and adopted strategies to mitigate such concerns (Kowalski, 2006). The local political leadership sought to maintain leadership control and minimize the potential influence that might be wielded by such a central position.

It is noteworthy that the evolution of the role of superintendent parallels the rise of the common school movement. The writings and influence of Horace Mann (1796-1859) elevated not only the importance of education as a key component of society and

civic growth, but also the profession that had emerged around education. As the de facto leader of schools, superintendents became a focal point, holding up the common school as an image of patriotism (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). This linkage between the civic mindedness of the common school movement and the institutional authority granted through the position of the superintendent established the position as a local leader.

A relative formalization of the profession began to emerge during this time as the superintendency became more common across the country. This led to new explorations of the potential roles of the position. Brunner et al. (2002) noted that the early days of the superintendency was guided, in many ways, by a servant ideology that pervaded all of American education. Certainly, the early superintendency was not a powerful position, but rather one that served the redeemer nation by way of serving the local board of education” (Brunner, Grogan, & Björk, 2002, p. 214).

As the 19th century came to a close, the National Education Association formally recognized the importance of the superintendency to the effective management of school systems in the Committee of Fifteen report (National Educational Association, 1895). This report recognized the distinct role of an elected board of education and provided detail regarding the role of a supervisor of instruction. The report delineated the roles of the school board and the superintendent in distinct ways. School boards came to be seen as the primary player in issues regarding politics and policy. Superintendents, on the other hand, were to focus on issues of instruction. “As a result, the rhetoric surrounding the nature of the position of superintendent became pointedly apolitical” (Brunner, Grogan, & Björk, 2001, p. 216), a reality that has had important implications for the position since.

At the turn of the century, the superintendency had come to be a recognized position and was susceptible to the popular theories of the day. One such theory emerged from the world of business and the pioneering work of Frederick Taylor. Taylor applied scientific management principles to the field of organizational management in an attempt to minimize waste and maximize production (Waring, 2016). Taylorism, as his approach came to be known, posited that management should be apolitical and based upon scientific principles. For many, these ideas were compelling and could be applied to any field, including educational leadership.

The application of such ideologies to education was greatly debated. Some felt that schools occupied a unique role in society distinct from business, and therefore immune to the same issues addressed through scientific management. Others felt the growth and complexity of schools, particularly those in urban environments, required a systematic approach to management (Cuban, 1976). The school board, being disconnected from the day-to-day processes within the school, were not necessarily the appropriate individuals to apply such management techniques. Superintendents, however, were in the ideal position to play such a role. Slowly school superintendents adopted this role as well.

Ultimately, superintendents embraced this shift in the position, though there is debate as to the rationale. Some scholars have reflected upon this shift as a lack of conviction and courage on the part of superintendents (Callahan, 1962), in essence, continuing to function as the utility servants of the board. Others, such as Tyack (1974) and Thomas and Moran (1992), have considered the shift more thought-out; perhaps indicating a growing political complexity to the role of superintendent.

The intervening one hundred years have seen the growth of new roles and shifting priorities in relation to the superintendency. While societal influences required different skills, the fundamental position of the superintendent remained the same. Today, the superintendent still serves as an employee of the school board, but has taken a much more defined role as the board's chief executive officer and educational advisor (Kowalski, 2006). At the same time, the superintendent is positioned as the primary educational leader for the district, overseeing all aspects of the school system, from human resources to professional development. Therefore, in order to accomplish such varied requirements, modern superintendents must rely on a broad range of skills. Such skills have been outlined within a range of role conceptualizations that scholars have applied to the superintendency over the last 50 years.

Conceptualizations of the Superintendency

Many scholars have studied the roles and conceptual evolutions of the superintendency. In many ways, the evolution of the role and function of the superintendency mirrors the historical evolution outlined above. In the following section, I will address the varied and contested roles of the superintendency as they have been outlined by scholars in the field. Due to the many differing perspectives on this topic, I draw upon the work of Callahan (1966) as a primary framework to guide my discussion.

The role of the superintendent has been one of evolution as it has responded to increasing complexity of the position, more ardent political debates, and a general change in the nature of its work (Björk & Kowalski, 2005; Callahan, 1966; Kowalski, 2006). Primary to my understanding of the nature of the superintendency is Callahan's (1966) conceptualizations of the role of the school superintendent. In analyzing the position

between 1850 and the mid-1960s, Callahan identified four normative roles for the position of superintendent. These conceptualized roles evolved in an evolutionary fashion, wherein superintendents focused on the roles necessitated by the demands of the day. Callahan's conceptualizations were:

- 1). Teacher scholar (1850 to early 1900s),
- 2). Organizational manager (early 1900s to 1930),
- 3). Educational statesman (1930 to mid-1950s), and
- 4). Applied social scientist (mid-1950s to mid-1960s).

While all four conceptions of the superintendency are essential for effective practice, the importance of each has varied greatly over time and individual superintendents may excel in one or more conceptualizations (Kowalski & Björk, 2005).

Kowalski noted that as U.S. society has transitioned from a manufacturing to an information-based society, the expectations of the superintendency have come to include the role of a communicator as well (Kowalski, 2005). Therefore, introducing a fifth conceptualization, communicator:

- 5). Communicator (mid-1960s to present)

The conception of the school superintendent as a communicator is framed within two conditions: "the need to restructure school cultures and the need to access and use information in a timely manner to solve problems of practice" (Kowalski & Björk, 2005, p. 86).

These five role conceptualizations establish the basis of superintendency roles from which I started this study. Within each conceptualization there are varied details and compelling rationale for their establishment. I will now provide an overview of how

scholarship has interpreted, challenged, or evolved each of the five role conceptualizations.

Teacher scholar. The conception of the superintendent as teacher scholar, which, according to, Callahan (1966) was first evident between 1865-1910, is characterized by a superintendency that considered its own role as primarily one of educational and philosophical leadership. Callahan stated, during this time “the chief school administrators saw themselves, and others saw them, as scholarly educational leaders and, depending on the man, to some extent as philosophers” (p. 188).

The emergence of this role is closely linked to the establishment of the position of the superintendency as boards of education, often comprised of non-educators, did not possess the technical expertise to effectively lead complex education institutions on issues of teaching and learning. Cuban (1976) indicated that this role was the explicit rationale for the creation of the superintendency: “the teacher-scholar conception derived directly from the mandate of school boards to their first appointees” (p. 19). This relationship benefited school board members who were able to entrust issues of teaching and learning to the superintendent while retaining the political benefits afforded from their relationship to the district (Boyd, 1974, 1976; Land, 2002).

In practice, the formation of the teacher scholar role may have had more to do with the political realities of the day than anything else. The political machinery of cities in the mid- to late-1800s had reason to limit the political influence and perspective of the position of the superintendency. The individuals who served on school boards, and ultimately hired superintendents were often part of the local political machine with interests that they sought to preserve. As such, the individuals selected for the position of

superintendent were chosen because of their abilities to lead educators and not for their organizational managerial capacities. That being said, superintendents' expertise in educational matters gave them a distinct advantage over lay boards, which may have begun to sow seeds of distrust (Boyd, 1974). Kowalski (2006) noted that it was not uncommon for political elites of the day to see "superintendents as manipulative" (p. 38) figures that must be treated with caution.

Slowly this dynamic began to shift. In the late 1800s, reform efforts began to shrink the size of school boards, which eventually necessitated further reliance on the superintendent. In addition, major shifts in the profession, such as the Committee of Fifteen report (National Educational Association, 1895), began to formalize and standardize the profession of the superintendency, as will be discussed in the next section.

Business executive. Callahan (1962, 1966) casts a decidedly negative light on the period of superintendent evolution that occurred between 1910 and 1929. For him, this time period signaled the rise of secular managerial techniques that distracted the superintendent from his core role as an educational leader. It was, in fact, this managerial role of the superintendent that first drove Callahan to better understand the varying roles of the superintendency. Writing in 1966, he stated,

I began my research on school administration and school administrators in 1956. I was concerned then to discover how and why, by 1925, the superintendent of schools was being trained as and was behaving on the job in a fashion which closely resembled a manager or executive in a business or industrial concern. (p. 6)

The concerning change that Callahan referenced was part of a shift in the primary responsibility of the superintendent occurred in the early years of the 20th century. While Callahan (1966) referred to this new conception of the superintendency as the business executive or managerial role, Cuban (1974) referred to it as the chief administrator and Brunner, Grogan, and Björk (2002) as the expert manager.

It was during this time that American society became enamored with the concept of scientific management in light of Taylorism. In what I consider to be a proto-school reform strategy, many saw scientific management as an approach to organizational management that could be applied to school districts to increase effectiveness and minimize waste. The successful outcomes from such business practices became a clarion call to reform all aspects of American society to embrace scientific management principles. Additional societal forces, including the rise of muckraking journalism, idolization of the successful business leader in American culture and a general cultural wariness of governmental systems, all informed the development of a new conceptualization of the superintendency in the early 1900s.

This shift was reinforced by schools of education that saw the growing popularity of scientific management principles across society as an opportunity to expand or create new superintendent preparation programs (Callahan, 1966). New programs supported the alteration of leadership practice and solidified a role shift to not only emphasizing the educational expertise of the superintendent, but also the organizational management component of the position. During this time, the primary management roles assigned to superintendents included budget development and administration, standardization of operation, personnel management, and facility management (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011).

Another important shift that occurred within society during this time was a growing distrust of the political system. Muckraking journalists of the progressive era shed light on the sordidness of political institutions and political machinery. This led to a call for apolitical management of public services (Boyd, 1974; 1976). Schools were not immune from the discontent and concerted efforts emerged to explicate educational institutions from politics, further differentiating the roles of the superintendency and the school board. Boyd (1976) noted that the new model of school governance that emerged from this “sought to insulate the schools from the seaminess of politics and to promote efficiency and effectiveness in management through the application of professional administrative expertise” (p. 543).

The societal changes that influenced the superintendency during the early 1900s had lasting impact for the position. The superintendency continued to evolve, though, adding not only complexity, but contradictory expectations with respect to certain elements of practice.

Educational statesman. Whereas Callahan (1966) bristled at the business managerial influences on education in the early 1900s, he found in the early 1930s a model superintendent in the form of John Newlon. Newlon, a former principal, superintendent, and college professor, espoused a collective, social approach to school leadership that came to form the basis of Callahan’s (1966) conception of the educational statesman. With the relative decline of political machines and growing centralized power of school leadership, scholars began to note that the superintendent’s relationship with the community and the board necessitated political skills, which for many at that time were deficient.

The role of the educational statesman was a distinctive shift from the concept of a manager or business executive. For Callahan (1966), the educational statesman was still concerned with issues of personnel and finance, albeit as a secondary concern, but now the superintendent filled a more significant role as a figure-head for the civic engagement of the school district. Rather than viewing himself as the sole source of knowledge and expertise, the statesman engaged multiple stakeholders in processing and acting upon critical decisions to be made by the school.

While Callahan (1966) envisioned the educational statesman as a politically savvy leader, forming coalitions to influence policy and practice in and around the school, Björk and Gurley (2005) argued convincingly that the descriptor ‘statesman’ in itself is misguided. They posit that the historical roots of the term may carry baggage that mischaracterizes the true role. In particular, Björk and Gurley (2005) argued that the use of the term statesman by Plato and Alexander Hamilton constructs a very different image of statesman than the one described by Callahan and seen in practice. They note, “the role has never been about a stately patriarch ubiquitously benevolently guiding school systems single-handedly toward a goal of success for all” (Björk & Gurley, 2005, p. 169). Instead, like Boyd (1974) and Brunner, Grogan, and Björk (2002) before, they propose the term political strategist as an apt descriptor of this role of the superintendency.

Recognizing the political role of the superintendent was a dramatic shift from prior conceptualizations. As stated before, much of the reform narrative of the early 1900s sought to separate politics from public management systems. The result of these efforts has led to an apolitical myth of the school leadership that has existed ever since (Kirst & Wirt, 1997). In addition, school boards had sought to keep the political power of

superintendents low so as not to challenge their own political base (Callahan, 1962). By acknowledging this new role, however, superintendents were now asked to function as “lobbyists and political strategists” (Kowalski & Björk, 2005, p. 82), tasks that required specific skills and particular aptitudes to fulfill.

For the modern superintendent, political challenges abound. Whether it is political battles with teachers unions or responding to legislative realities (either state or federal), superintendents have come to be seen as an expert voice and are expected to express their opinion or engage directly on political topics (Kirst & Wirt, 1997). Subsequent years have seen the establishment of superintendents’ political growth from an ideological statesman perspective to a theory and fact-based political strategist. A critical component to this shift was the growth of the applied social scientist role.

Applied social scientist. The mid-1950s brought with it a questioning of idealistic approaches to school leadership embraced by the statesman perspective. Callahan (1966) defined this shift from a questioning of what leadership should be to an analysis of what it really is. At the same time, colleges of education were also undergoing a philosophical shift, incorporating social science approaches into the curriculum for school leaders. In addition, professional organizations, including the National Conference of Professors of Education Association and the University Council of Education Administration were founded, ushering in a theory movement of educational leadership (Fusarelli & Fusarelli, 2005).

This shift brought with it a focus on applied social sciences. This perspective may be marked by a growth in empirical analysis and the ushering in of the theory movement within educational leadership. The goal was to infuse empiricism, predictability and

scientific certainty within the research and practice of educational leadership (Kowalski, 2006). In addition, the Kellogg Foundation was also influential in the shift toward the applied social scientist conception. During the 1950s, the Kellogg Foundation invested more than \$7 million in leadership preparation programs that allowed professors to conduct social science research (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011).

By infusing specialized knowledge into the role of the superintendency, the position increased in rank and status (Fusarelli & Fusarelli, 2003). This new rank and status generated unintended consequences with respect to the relationship between the superintendency and the public. This is due to a historical tension within public servant positions; the more knowledge and specialized expertise one accrues, the less likely that public servant is to act to the will of the people (Kowalski, 2006). This inherently shifts the power of educational decision making away from the populace. The result of this shift may be seen in modern day activist and reform organizations that seek to have greater voices in educational matters.

Significant ideational currents sustained the importance of the applied social scientist role of the superintendency. Fusarelli and Fusarelli (2005) found powerful demographic and societal changes, systemic reform initiatives, and social justice orientations within leadership preparation programs have developed a modern superintendency that is not only heavily invested in social science topics, but expected to be so by their constituencies.

The last of these currents, namely a social justice orientation within leadership preparation programs, has had a significant impact on the modern conceptualization of the superintendency. Superintendents are encouraged to use their elevated status and

positional power as a resource to encourage politicians and business leaders to support and advocate for students (Fusarelli & Fusarelli, 2005). “Part of leading for social justice... is understanding that one is not just a leader but an activist for children, an activist who is committed to supporting educational equity and excellence for all children” (Pounder, Reitzug, & Young, 2002, p. 272).

Communicator. Kowalski (2005) put forth a fifth role to extend Callahan’s (1966) conceptualizations of the superintendency. Grounded in the realization that all the previous conceptualizations required distinct and advanced communicative skills, Kowalski conceptualized the superintendent as communicator. Two important needs have elevated the importance of the superintendent being a communicator: “the need to restructure school cultures and the need to access and use information in a timely manner to solve problems of practice” (Kowalski & Björk, 2005, p. 86).

While Callahan (1966) addressed each of the role conceptualizations as distinct entities informed by particular social and time constraints, the reality is that his role assumptions were normative, wherein all of the varied roles existed at the same time but were manifested more prominently in relation to varying societal needs. Superintendents always needed advanced communicative skills in order to navigate the complex reality of running a large organization like a school district, which is not only accountable to its staff and students, but also the community.

Brunner, Grogan, and Björk (2011) identified the rise of the superintendent as a communicator as a distinct role in relation to growing criticisms of the educational system from the mid-1950s. In this manner, superintendents were called to account for declining academic achievement in light of greater public criticism. It is notable that this

conception for Brunner, Grogan, and Björk is parallel to Callahan's conception of the applied social scientist in terms of time. Callahan (1966) claimed that the rise of the applied social scientist role of the superintendency elevated the expertise of the superintendency; therefore, as criticisms began to mount against public education, the superintendent was positioned to counter and respond to those challenges in a public fashion. The superintendent became the face and voice of the public education system, no longer functioning as simply an employee of the board.

Cuban (1985) argued "superintendents must play the role of politician, manager and teacher simultaneously" (p. 29). The reality is that the number of roles that superintendents must fulfill changes frequently in reaction to larger societal, community, and organizational needs (Brunner et al., 2002; Callahan, 1966; Cuban, 1976). New conceptualizations of the superintendency will continue to emerge and existing ones will be modified. Grogan (2000) and Brunner (2002), for instance, criticized the current conceptualizations for marginalizing the female perspective in the superintendency. For this reason, it is necessary to continue to study the superintendency in light of larger societal pressures. For such an important role within our educational system, it is critical that we as a field understand the various roles of the position and use that information to prepare ready and capable leaders.

The evolution of the superintendency is an indicator of the complexity that confronts school leaders on a daily basis. On any given day, superintendents not only deal with the ostensible purpose of public education, namely teaching and learning, but also must manage complex organizational structures, interact with the public and industry,

react to political and competing forces and stay abreast of current research-based best-practices in order to keep the learning environment relevant.

Defining Political

Before one may undertake a study of political discourse, it is imperative to define the term political. Politics is so pervasive that narrowing to a single definition is incredibly complex. In its most basic form, politics may be refined to analysis of “who gets what, when, and how” (Blase & Blase, 2002, p. 7). In order to operationalize the term politics for this study, however, I must further clarify my use of political. Johnson and Johnson (2000) defined *political discourse* as “the formal exchange of reasoned views as to which of several alternative courses of action should be taken to solve a societal problem” (p. 292). It is this latter definition that most accurately captures my approach to political in this study. That is, I consider discourse that is purposeful in nature and constructed to solve societal problems as political in nature. Some defining elements that may identify such discourse as political include reference to political actors, legislation, or policy oriented topics.

The last of these ideas, policy oriented topics, is potentially the most difficult to define. For instance, a case may be made that discussions of salaries are apolitical. For a state that struggles with teacher attraction and housing prices, however, conversations about salary may become political very quickly as individuals make a case for higher pay to attract and retain highly qualified candidates to the field. The state legislature holds the power to restrict or free budgetary dollars that will directly affect teacher pay, therefore a direct line can be made between an individual’s stance on the issue of teacher pay and the

political orientation of the party advocating for or against the school budgetary considerations.

This is, admittedly, a broad interpretation of political. Other discourse theorists take a much narrower view of political discourse. For instance, Van Dijk (1997) limited political discourse proper only to those individuals who currently serve in political positions (whether appointed or elected). I challenge this conception because it discounts political dialogue from those serving in roles that historically are not directly political. I believe political discourse is possible for non-politicians and, in fact, analyzing the political discourse of non-politicians may present unique and compelling avenues of analysis.

One example of this may be one's discussion of an upcoming election. While that individual is not running for, elected to, or appointed by the position in question, the nature of the conversation is certainly political. This seems to be apparent without question. However, let me push this thought experiment a step further. Let us envision an individual who uses the term education reform to refer to a recent education initiative being embraced by the school board. The use of reform 20 years ago would have a significantly different meaning than it does today (Berkovich, 2011). The use today is laden with the political narrative frequently encountered with education issues and an external agenda seeking to push reform issues. The use of a term, in this case, draws upon a large meta-narrative connected to the education community that instantly places it within political discourse. Furthermore, in this case those who would recognize and use such a term are likely disconnected from the political system as it is used most frequently as an oppressive point.

Politics and the Superintendency

Scholars have acknowledged that the superintendency has been informed by multiple structural and societal shifts over the last 180 years. Beginning in the mid-1900s there began a distinctive awareness of the political nature of the position. The reality is that regardless of which role is being manifest, all require political acuity. In particular, the roles of educational statesman, applied social scientist, and communicator require significant political adeptness to be able to compete for scarce resources and advocate on behalf of the district and students while not alienating key stakeholders. In this section, I will explore the scholarly literature as it relates to the nature of politics in the practice of the superintendency.

Increased scrutiny of the performance of the U.S. educational system has amplified the political nature of education. Perhaps, most notably, the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) called attention to the outcomes of the nation's educational system and encouraged widespread reforms in order to better position the United States to compete on the global stage. In effect, the report politicized the nation's educational systems, bringing lawmakers and educators to common topics and setting in motion a conversation about schools that continues today.

Long before the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, however, the position of superintendent was already becoming increasingly political. Boyd (1974) noted that “nonpolitical” ideology of many educational leaders was detrimental to their abilities to fulfill their duties and, perhaps, led to high rates of attrition. In fact, he recommended the development of new training “designed to increase political sensitivity and foster the

acquisition of skills and attitudes needed for successful conflict management” (Boyd, 1974, p. 4).

For Callahan (1966), this political aspect of the superintendency emerged under the role of educational statesman. The term statesman was applied to this role because of the growing importance of the superintendent as a linchpin between the school and the community. Quoting Ernest Melby, Callahan stated, “The concept of administration... recognizes the centrality of the community in strengthening the democratic process. It conceives of education as a process of creative living and of administration as creative leadership. It sees the entire community as an educational resource...” (p. 215).

While Callahan envisaged the educational statesman as a politically savvy leader, forming coalitions to influence policy and practice in and around the school, Björk and Gurley (2005) argued convincingly that the descriptor statesman in itself is misguided. They make the case that Callahan’s appropriation of the term statesman was simply a misnomer. They reached this conclusion by analyzing the historical application of the term.

Björk and Gurley (2005) analyzed the historical roots of the term statesman by examining how Plato and Alexander Hamilton applied the term at two distinct points in history. From the Platonic perspective in *Politicus*, a statesman is a highly skilled and educated individual who governs benevolently for the betterment of individuals and the commonwealth. Hamilton, on the other hand, conceived of the statesman as elevated from the public and engaged in the process of influencing and working with other elite decision-makers. Both perspectives distinguished the statesman as a political agent working on behalf of others, separated from his constituents by position, authority, and

capacity, but nevertheless acting on behalf of his constituency at all times. Noting that neither of these definitions accurately reflect the role of the superintendency, many scholars have come to reject the term statesman altogether, instead embracing other terms, such as political strategist (Boyd, 1974; Brunner, Grogan & Björk, 2001) or democratic leader (Björk & Gurley, 2005).

It should be noted, not all political engagement is equal. A distinction exists between macro-political and micro-political engagement (Björk & Gurley, 2005). Much of the existing literature on the politics of the superintendency focuses explicitly on micro-politics (Björk & Gurley, 2005; Blase & Blase, 2002; Lindle, 1994; Marshall & Scribner, 1991; Willower, 1991). While a clear definition for micro-politics does not exist, it may be characterized by more localized, person-to-person politics that dominates the everyday life within organizations. Macro-politics, on the other hand, may be defined as the type of political engagement that focuses outside of the schoolhouse, more than likely on local, state or national issues (Blase & Blase, 2002).

Further complicating the distinction, explicating macro-politics from micro-politics is not completely possible. As Blase and Blase (2002) indicated, often macro-political, or external factors, influence micro-political processes and structures. Furthermore, Björk and Gurley (2005) noted micro-politics are not necessarily defined by context (i.e., the schoolhouse, the community or the state), but the nature of the engagement. Lindle (1994) noted that micro-politics is based in the accumulation and exercising of power. The superintendent, by the very nature of his or her position, naturally engages in micro-political issues daily. Overall, superintendents have been

much quicker and more likely to acknowledge their role in micro-political issues and much of the research on the superintendency politics focused on such.

Macro-political engagement is more difficult, and ultimately dangerous, for superintendents. In many ways, historically, superintendent engagement in macro-political engagement has been hidden from view as superintendents have relied on behind closed-doors conversations or professional organizations to accomplish their goals. The potential risks of such overt political positioning are simply too risky for a superintendent, who must not only keep his or her board happy, but also the community in which he or she works (Boyd, 1974). Surprisingly, little has been written on the prominence or practice of macro-political engagement by superintendents. One reason for a lack of discussion or overt acknowledgement of macro-political engagement may be attributed to what Kirst and Wirt (1997) refer to as the apolitical myth that attends the superintendency.

The Apolitical Myth

Cuban (1985) noted that historically superintendents have encountered two “occupational taboos - one branding politics as distressful, the other marking conflict as a disease to be quarantined” (p. 144). This detachment from political involvement with schools emerged as a result of the historically troublesome relationship between schools and local political systems. According to Kirst and Wirt (1997), the early 1900s were a time of political patronage and favoritism and schools were frequently seen as spoils of the political process. In light of this, not only has there been an ostensible avoidance of political issues by school leaders, but also school leadership preparation programs have ignored the political tumult encountered by school leaders (Lindle, 1994).

Kirst and Wirt (1997) asserted that this perception is based largely in myth. In fact, the modern superintendency is a position mired in political dynamics (Kowalski, 2006). The educational environment in which they are charged to lead is frequently buffeted by desires and demands of elected officials, special interest groups, board members, and community constituents at large. In order to respond to such external demands, while at the same time managing internal pressures inherent in leadership, school leaders rely upon various strategies (Björk & Keedy, 2001; Cuban, 1985).

The basis for this myth lies in the historical and social evolutions outlined before. From its very beginnings, formal educational institutions had reason to be cautious of the negative consequences of being too closely associated with politics, which quickly descended into a form of political spoils. This distrust was compounded in the early 1900s as progressive era reformers challenged the ability of politics to rise above the steaminess of party machinery. There may have been a personal benefit for superintendents to encourage and maintain the apolitical myth as well. Kirst and Wirt (1997) noted that the myth held relative benefits for educational leaders, “namely, more legitimacy and money if they preserved the image of the public schools as a uniquely nonpolitical function of government” (p. 28).

However, like any organization, schools exist within a political arena buffeted by multiple internal and external forces competing for limited resources (Bolman & Deal, 2003). As a result, superintendents find themselves engaged in ongoing complex interactions, both internal to the school district and external to the community and state. This dynamic interplay puts superintendents in a position in which much of their time is

“spent on the persuasion and discussion that are the essence of building internal and state-level coalitions - that is, a political role” (Kirst & Wirt, 2009, p. 186).

Regardless, the apolitical myth persists throughout much of society. “By mutual but unspoken long-standing agreement, American citizens and scholars have contended that the world of education is and should be separate from the world of politics” (Kirst & Wirt, 1997, p. 28). Therefore, it is not surprising that in a 2010 survey of superintendents, only 5% indicated that they participate in overt political actions (Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young, & Ellerson, 2011). Yet, superintendents do engage in macro-political discourse. Counter to Boyd’s (1974) finding that school superintendents prefer a “nonpolitical role” (p. 1), many superintendents are actively engaged in political activities, including local convenings, radio interviews, testimonies before legislatures, and more and more frequently, online through blogs and social media.

Image Management

An intriguing aspect of the apolitical myth is the postulation that some school leaders may construct an apolitical façade to benefit their image among the community. This practice may have been shown to be relevant to the superintendent through compelling research on the concept of image management by superintendents. Nestor-Baker and Hoy (2001) analyzed superintendents they referred to as *reputationally successful* in order to better understand how they managed their public image. The authors found that, “reputationally successful superintendents appear to use numerous avenues to strengthen their roles and their images” (p. 107). These avenues include self-promotion strategies, involvement with board politics, and making strategic hiring decisions. While strategically constructing the image the superintendent wants the

community to see, he or she also acknowledges the perceived notions of the superintendency to which he or she must conform. In short, superintendents are to not rock the boat, be a pillar of virtue within the community, and care deeply for the students he or she serves.

In constructing their images, reputationally successful superintendents acknowledge that they were expected to conform to socially expected roles within the community. Such an awareness calls to mind the principles of role theory (Goffman, 1959). Superintendents assume the clothing of the position upon taking office and must strive to fulfill the role that the various stakeholders expect. In one account within Nestor-Baker and Hoy's (2001) study, a participant stated: "You don't go into a bar, you don't drink in the district. You always have to be a role model. You have to be careful about wearing your blue jeans. Sometimes I get tired of it" (p. 108). This comment underlies the inherent tension when an individual must fulfill the culturally expected role, even though it may clash with the individual's own sense of identity.

Historically, superintendents have utilized various strategies for such role manifestations, dependent upon the audience and environment. There is a growing acceptance of the reality that digital environments may be just as useful as real ones for constructing identities. Twitter is one avenue for this.

Twitter

Twitter has come to play an increasingly powerful role in modern life. What started as a simple messaging platform in 2006, has now become a pervasive tool that provides a unique insight into social, cultural and political movements across the world. Its ubiquity in modern culture speaks to how much it has changed the way modern

individuals interact with and receive information. Twitter has 316 million active users, sending 500 million tweets a day (Twitter, 2016). The core component of the service is the capability of users to create a tweet, which consists of a short message, limited to 140 characters or less. The initial concept of the tweet was intended to answer the question “What are you doing?” The very construction of this question begs the user to share personal information. In 2009, responding to the realization that Twitter usage had moved beyond short updates about personal details to include larger, societal narratives, Twitter made the decision to change the prompt for a tweet to “What’s happening?” (Twitter, 2009).

Once created, users can share the tweet, making their message available to any other user who chooses to follow him/her or search for similar messages on Twitter. While limited to 140 characters, tweets have the capacity to do quite a bit. For instance, users have the ability to embed hyperlinks to take readers to websites of interest. Nearly any website one visits has the ability to mechanize the sharing of hyperlinks through a tweet button, which frequently auto-populates text and links to share on Twitter.

Hashtags (#) are another important component of Twitter. Hashtags have been used in online environments since the late-1990s in internet relay chat channels and other online sharing tools, such as Flickr (Bruns & Burgess, 2011). In 2007, technologist Chris Messina began advocating for the use of hashtags on Twitter as a strategy to develop informal networks and to categorize the always flowing stream of information that occurs on Twitter (Messina, 2007). Today, hashtags are a ubiquitous technology syntax that are used inside and outside Twitter for everything from marketing to social activism. In many professional communities, including education, hashtags have become a mechanism for

creating conversations about common topics. It is easy for individuals to engage in larger discussions regarding standards or professional practice simply by following or tweeting hashtags like #commoncore or #edchat.

Users may also interact with one another on Twitter by indicating a message intended for a single person or organization. This is accomplished through the inclusion of the @ symbol and the specified Twitter handle. These tweets are still open and public for all to see (unless the sender's account is private), however the @ symbol makes known for all that the message was specifically intended for that recipient. Furthermore, the intended recipient of the tweet will receive notification that they were mentioned in a tweet. Such a structure has the ability to create open conversations between individuals or groups around common topics.

Finally, users have the capacity to retweet something shared by another user. Frequently preceded by RT, though not always, a retweet allows a user to share another user's tweet to his/her own followers, thereby spreading the initial message to a broader audience. Retweeting is a core component of Twitter and the number of retweets is readily visible at the bottom of every tweet.

The four resources for composing a tweet outlined above shows that users may be able to accomplish complicated and varied tasks in the limited space of 140 characters. This linguistic freedom has allowed for interesting, and surprisingly, complex discursive interactions. Twitter has allowed for society to develop new ways to interact with culture and shifted the manner in which colleagues and peers communicate across technology. Because of this complex dynamic, Twitter has become a topic of great interest to scholars from numerous fields, including computer sciences, biology, psychology, and education.

Research on Twitter

Twitter is now more than a decade old and scholars have begun to recognize its importance on society and have developed varied methods to analyze its usage. Broad studies of Twitter activity have primarily focused on social network analysis methods to better understand the development of networks among individuals (Gruzd, Wellman, & Takhteyev, 2011; Wang, Sauers, & Richardson, 2016). While useful from a meta perspective, such analyses do not provide insight into the content of specific tweets.

Other scholars have sought to better understand linguistic practices using more finite quantitative measures. For instance, Cunha et al. (2014) analyzed hashtag usage among men and women to better understand gendered discursive practices on Twitter. Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, Gamon and Dumais (2011) employed a probabilistic framework to study the nature of conversations between individuals on Twitter, finding that individuals adopted stylistic accommodations among social groups on the platform. Perhaps the fastest growing methodology used to analyze Twitter from a discursive perspective is sentiment analysis. Eichstadt et al. (2015) employed sentiment analysis to tie linguistic practices to an elevated likelihood of atherosclerotic heart disease.

Qualitative approaches to Twitter analysis are significantly more difficult due to the sheer volume of tweets. Ybarra, boyd, Korchmaros and Oppenheim (2012) and Marwick and boyd (2011) used surveys to overcome such barriers and gather user feedback regarding Twitter usage. While such methods provide unique data, the methodology disconnects the findings from *in situ* discursive practices and may not provide a clear understanding language use on Twitter.

There is a relatively small sample of scholars employing discourse analysis techniques to better understand the discursive practices of individuals on Twitter. Page (2012) employed content analysis, using tenets of critical discourse analysis to analyze the use of the @ symbol in tweets. Such linguistic structures that are unique to computer mediated discourse requires purposeful and distinct approaches to analysis that expand upon the frameworks traditionally employed by discourse analysts (Giles, Stommel, Paulus, Lester, & Reed, 2016). The barriers in place for scholars, including technological barriers to gathering data and volume barriers in terms of how many tweets there are, make any meaningful examination of Twitter usage through deep discourse analysis very difficult.

School Leadership and Twitter

Recently, scholars of school leadership have begun to embrace social media as an important topic to explore as it relates to school leadership practices. In particular, researchers have sought to better understand how the use of tools like Twitter may be impacting the practice of school leadership. Many have focused primarily on interconnectivity of Twitter as a tool for developing new and expanded professional learning networks (PLNs) (Carpenter & Krutka, 2014; Cho, 2013; Couros & Jarrett, 2012; Sauers & Richardson, 2015).

Cho (2013) conducted interviews and content analysis in an attempt to better understand the practices of school leaders on Twitter. His findings indicated that school leaders discussed a variety of topics on Twitter, including technology, announcements, personal promotion, and educational policies. This finding was confirmed by Sauers and

Richardson (2015), who concluded that Twitter is a platform that is providing educators new ways to “communicate, learn and grow” (p. 141).

In a study of school superintendents’ use of social media, Cox and McLeod (2014) found that Twitter can be a powerful tool in developing a two-way communication channel with community stakeholders and colleagues. It provides an opportunity to not only share important professional information, but also professional practices across communities. Likewise, Roth (2016) found that superintendents utilize Twitter as a means of forming a PLN and sharing information. Additionally, Roth found that Twitter has a particular ability to provide a level of transparency to the profession, allowing superintendents to “communicate a vision for purposeful change, advocate for funding and policy, and model effective technology” (p. V).

Social media has become an important aspect of the way modern society communicates. Twitter has been proven to be uniquely suited to political discourse across society. This fact was reinforced by the role that Twitter played in the U.S. presidential election in 2016 (Hess, 2017). The reality of this role, however, reinforced the political riskiness inherent in discussing politics online. Oftentimes, politics on social media has the ability to cause vitriolic and irrational responses, even from the politicians themselves (Ott, 2017).

Despite this fact, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the political discourse of school superintendents on Twitter. The scholarly work of Cho (2013), Cox and McLeod (2014), Roth (2016), and Sauers and Richardson (2015) indicate there is reason to believe that school leaders may be engaging in political, and specifically macro-political, discourse on Twitter, but there has not been an analysis of such yet. This study

seeks to fill that gap in order to better understand practice and the continued evolution of the superintendency.

Impression Management

A growing area of interest among Twitter scholars has been the strategies individuals employ online to influence the perceptions others may have of them (Jackson, 2011; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Walden & Parcha, 2017). The concept of impression management is a useful framework to better understand the strategies and resources that individuals employ. The foundation for impression management may be found in the work of Goffman (1959). Goffman proposed that individuals, when appearing before others, had many “motives for trying to control the impression they (others) receive” (p. 8). Therefore, like actors in a play, individuals seek to give the impression that they adequately fill the socially expected roles they hold.

Twitter is an intriguing tool when viewed through the lens of impression management. Individuals have the ability to apply strategy to their Twitter engagement in the hopes of crafting specific narratives or impressions for their followers (Crane, 2012; Marwick & boyd, 2011). Jackson (2011) showed that British politicians used Twitter as an impression management tool. He found members of Parliament used Twitter to build their own public image to further their political impact, but also to show themselves engaged in local issues as a way to create an image of themselves as public servants. Likewise, Walden and Parcha (2017) applied the tenets of impression management to the Twitter activity of public relations managers. They found the publicness of Twitter required individuals to monitor their personal, as well as professional, accounts and blurred the lines between work and home.

An interesting finding from Cho and Snodgrass Rangel's (2016) study was that school leaders are very much aware of the dangers involved in discussing political topics on Twitter. One participant shared his rule of "don't put anything out there that you wouldn't be comfortable showing to board members" (p. 28). Another participant noted there is definitely politics and faith interspersed within his Twitter account that he uses in relation to his role as a school leader. His rationale was "Who I am is what people get" (p. 29). This indicates school leaders are not stepping into the world of social media blindly. There is at least some awareness of the potential consequences and, perhaps, some strategy to its usage. As more school leaders begin to use Twitter, however, a dialogue regarding expectations and, ultimately, comfort must occur with regard to what and when to share political information.

There is a relative dearth of studies applying the concept of impression management to the role of the superintendency. Cho and Snodgrass Rangel (2016) examined the nature of impression management for school leaders who use Twitter. While this study included superintendents, the broader topic of school leadership took precedence and therefore the study did not examine the unique position and nature of the superintendency. The only study explicitly linking the position of the superintendency to the concepts of impression management is found in the analysis of reputationally successful superintendents conducted by Nestor-Baker and Hoy (2001). There have been no studies, however, extending the idea of impression management and the superintendency to practice on Twitter.

Social Constructionism and Poststructuralism

It is necessary to unpack the key philosophical perspectives that I, as the researcher, hold while engaging in data analysis. In the following section I will discuss the philosophical and theoretical traditions most closely connected with discourse analysis: social constructionism and poststructuralism (Augoustinos, Walker, & Donaghue, 2014).

Both social constructionism and poststructuralism are philosophical orientations that challenge taken-for-granted knowledge. There are subtle distinctions between the two philosophical perspectives and it is important to delineate those differences to further our understanding of the role of discourse within society.

The social constructionist perspective emerged as a challenge to the assumptions inherent in positivist orientations (Khoja-Moolji, 2014). As a theoretical approach, social constructionism is distinguished from other perspectives by the fact that it posits that knowledge is situationally and historically relative. Burr (2003) attempted to provide a comprehensive overview of the key tenets of social constructionism. Explicating all of the assumptions inherent to social constructionism would be outside the scope of this study, however, it is important to explore key tenets that relate specifically to the execution of this study.

First, social constructionism takes a critical stance to taken-for-granted knowledge. This premise stands in opposition to other positivist or empirical traditions and encourages practitioners to be critical of observational reality. To the social constructionist, truth and reality do not exist independently, but instead are socially constructed by individuals and society. Of particular importance to the discourse analyst

is the proposition that the construction of knowledge is accomplished through language. As Burr (2003) noted, “knowledge of our world... is not derived from the nature of the world as it really is,” instead, “it is through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge become fabricated” (p. 4).

Another key premise of social constructionism is that truth is historically and culturally specific. Therefore, the categories and truths individuals associate with society are flexible and dependent upon one’s place. As an example, the notion of childhood is highly dependent upon the century in which one lives (Burr, 2003). In much the same way, what society considers as right and wrong can shift dramatically across communities and time. As such, the actions societies accept are sustained through individual constructions of the world.

Social constructionism has proven fruitful in the exploration of identity and role categorizations. Social constructionists argue that roles are historically contingent, locally specific, and change over time (Khoja-Moolji, 2014). Therefore, there is no stable framework upon which societal roles are mapped. This perspective holds important implications for the study of the superintendency because it posits that the conceptualizations associated with the role are fluid. The expectations of practice are continuous being constructed and deconstructed as societal mores change. Furthermore, even with a larger society, individual communities may construct alternative conceptualizations of role expectations.

Like social constructionism, poststructuralism is a complex philosophical perspective that is the subject of much debate regarding its core tenets and application.

Nevertheless, an overview of key poststructuralist ideas is helpful to better understanding the discourse analyst's perspective.

Built largely on the philosophical writings of Foucault (1995) and Derrida (1978), poststructuralism views the world as a flexible construct built upon interrelated realities. The poststructuralist perspective challenges the taken-for-granted perspectives imposed upon the world through structured relationships. "Poststructuralism concentrates on the moment when we impose meaning in a space that is no longer characterized by shared social agreement over the structure of meaning" (Harcourt, 2007, p. 1).

With respect to language, poststructuralism places emphasis on the everyday nature of language, *parole*, rather than on linguistic structures, *langue* (Potter & Wetherell, 1992). In other words, the linguistic structure of language matters less than its application and meaning. This position is a direct reaction to the Saussurian structuralist position, which theorized language as a fixed medium with constant meaning and relation (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Poststructural theory is also particularly concerned with power dynamics and the role that language plays in constituting and sustaining power. Michel Foucault (1972) conceptualized power as productive force that was sustained through its connection to knowledge. As an example of this connection, Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) provided the example of crime, wherein "it is hard to imagine the modern prison system without criminology" (p. 14). In this example, the prison system is the basis of power but utterly impotent without knowledge on the concepts related to criminology (Foucault, 1995). It is this linking of power to knowledge and the reliance of discursive processes to create knowledge, that has been of great importance to discourse analysts. Therefore, within

most discourse analysis questions, the realization that talk and text does something also begs the question of how the discourse might support or undermine traditional power structures.

Holding social constructionist and poststructuralist theoretical viewpoints has significant ontological repercussions for the assumptions inherent in this study. In short, I believe the roles associated with position of the superintendency both construct and are constructed by social interaction. Furthermore, the language used by superintendents is imbued with a power granted to the position through its status in relation to the community and education. Therefore, the political discourse of superintendents on Twitter is worthy of analysis because it holds import within the educational community but exists in the new, often decontextualized environment, of online text.

Role Theory

The philosophical perspectives of social constructionism and postructuralism have led me to using role theory as a theoretical orientation for this study. In doing so, I divert from other social media and discourse scholars who instead employ components of identity theory (Burke & Goodman, 2012; Chiluya, 2012; Crane, 2012). In this section, I will explicate the distinction between identity and role and contextualize my application of role theory.

When examining the social implications of technology use, many scholars seek to understand how identity is constructed. As Biddle (1979) noted, however, “The term identity is another one of those protean words that has acquired nearly as many meanings as it has authors to write about it” (p. 89). For this reason, any study seeking to explore the concept of identity must be very clear in the assumptions formed around the concept.

While exploring identity in relation to my own study, I have adopted a perspectival approach described by Stets and Burke (2000). For them, identity is a reflexive process in which the self “can categorize, classify, or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications” (p. 224).

An important aspect of this approach to identity is the authentic nature of the categorization. There is an implied intent to display aspects of one’s inner reality. This intention to transpose the inner self to external groups is a key component of any theoretical position with regard to identity.

Perhaps the most influential theorist in modern literature with respect to identity has been Erving Goffman. Goffman (1959) employed a dramaturgical approach to social interaction, focusing on the performative nature of social identity construction. Goffman established two important concepts with regard to identity construction. First, Goffman proposed that individuals actively construct and present a *front*, wherein individuals project a certain image they want the world to see (p. 22). The second concept that Goffman proposed was that of *impression management*, in which individuals actively seek to project an idealized image of themselves to the world rather than a true representation (p. 208). Both of these concepts are particularly important to the study of Twitter. The concept of front may be used to explore the imagery and structure of a subject’s Twitter profile; in essence the page becomes a ‘stage’ upon which one enacts their role as a political leader.

Goffman’s (1959) conception of identity marks a subtle, though important, shift in the manner in which one might conceptualize identity. The purpose of identity construction moves from the individual to the social. As such, the individual performs

identity in specific situations toward particular ends. This realization does not limit the truth of identity, but certainly shifts locus of control. Therefore, as I consider the political tweets of superintendents on Twitter, social identity theory seems particularly well-suited in that one might assume that the actions performed on Twitter are constructed with the audience in mind.

While Goffman's (1959) approach to social identity theory has many compelling arguments for use in this study, there are problems that emerge specifically as it relates to the methodological considerations inherent in discursive psychology. First, there is a concern with the potential of social desirability bias (Eichstaedt et al., 2015). Goffman posited that it is still possible to perform an inner identity for an external audience. The inner reality may be filtered through audience expectations, however, and be crafted to appeal to the particular needs at hand. I struggled with where one stops performing their own identity and begins to take on the identity expected by the audience; in essence falling victim to social desirability bias.

A second, and far more critical, concern I had with Goffman's (1959) conception relates to the theoretical positioning of social constructionism in general. The discourse analysis literature is split in how it refers to identity. Many discourse analysis experts simply study identity (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Wood & Kroger, 2000). Such approaches frequently refer to social identity theory explicitly.

When viewed through the lens of social constructionism, however, problems begin to emerge in the concept of identity. Adherents to a discursive psychology approach to discourse analysis reject the idea of a single, constant identity, and instead hold to the idea of discursively constituted identities (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). While social

identity theory acknowledges the audience and the variable nature of identity relative to context, there still is an implicit understanding that identity is an internal construct that moves from within the individual out into the world. This is a decidedly cognitivist approach. Instead, a constructionist approach would posit that there are no fixed internal realities and identities are constructs developed through talk and text. In this sense, the historical roots of identity may make appropriation of that term impossible. For this reason, I am drawn to the concept of role.

Such a shift is not without precedence. Role theory is an established orientation that has many similarities to social identity theory, but diverges in important ways. Like Goffman's conception of identity, role theory recognizes that self-presentation is performative in nature. The difference between the two approaches lies in the understanding that roles do not purport to convey an internal reality, but are limited to social positioning. In essence, role theory is concerned with behaviors within contexts (Biddle, 1979).

Role theory has been accepted within discourse analysis as a suitable alternative to social identity theory, though very few analyses of the differences have been conducted. Potter and Wetherell (1992) and Billig (1996) both adhere to role theory within their understanding discourse analysis. Potter and Wetherell (1992) stated, "social positions exist independently of any particular individual; they are impersonal" (p. 98). As such, individuals conform to positions to satisfy cultural expectations. Roles are performed in an attempt to impress a given audience at a given time (Billig, 1996).

Furthermore, role theory is uniquely suited to a social constructionist and poststructuralist perspective. The concept of roles as being situationally located and

performative in nature adheres closely to the social constructionist perspective of knowledge creation. The individuals for whom the superintendent performs the role as just as important as receivers of information as they are as builders of the expected norms to which the role performs.

The manner in which individuals go about constructing and performing these roles is discursive in nature. Additionally, the existence of the expected roles is created and maintained through discursive processes. In other words, the role of the superintendent is not a fixed position, but is constantly recreated and evolved through discursive processes (Brunner et al., 2002; Callahan, 1966). In addition, one acting in the role of superintendent does not become a superintendent by simply putting on the garb of that role, but takes on the discursive practices and enacts the role to fill the cultural expectations of the audience.

While I do not believe that Callahan's (1966) use of the word 'role' was specifically grounded in role theory, the fact that he chose that term to define the varying responsibilities of the superintendency is helpful. Roles may not provide a consistent understanding for the manifestation of particular behaviors. Bates and Harvey (1975) provided the concept of *function* as a means to linking normative performances inherent in a role to the practiced behavior. For instance, the role of disciplinarian within the American family has particular norms and expectations associated with it. The practice of the disciplinarian role by a mother may only be determined through observed practice and defined through the relation of its function to the normative expectation inherent in the role.

Such a definition of role norms is useful in order to link role fulfillment to practice; however, it is equally problematic as it relates to the superintendency. This is particularly vexing because while Callahan (1966), Björk and Gurley (2005), and Brunner (2002) provide important work in the conceptualizations of the superintendency, they do not detail normative practices that constitute each particular role. Therefore, linking behavior to norm through function is a complex, and often messy task.

Conceptual Framework

I have attempted to operationalize role theory as it relates to my understanding of Callahan's (1966) conceptualizations through the development of a conceptual framework. In this section, I will provide an overview of this framework and position it in relation to the study at hand.

The conceptual framework employed in this study applies the concepts of role theory to the position of the superintendency. I hold that the roles associated with the position of the superintendent are socially constructed expectations that have been influenced by societal and local community discursive processes. I have termed these societal and local community influences as key stakeholders, which includes school board members, district teachers and employees, students, community members, and local, state, and national politicians. This conceptualization may best be understood through a visualization, as found in Figure 1.

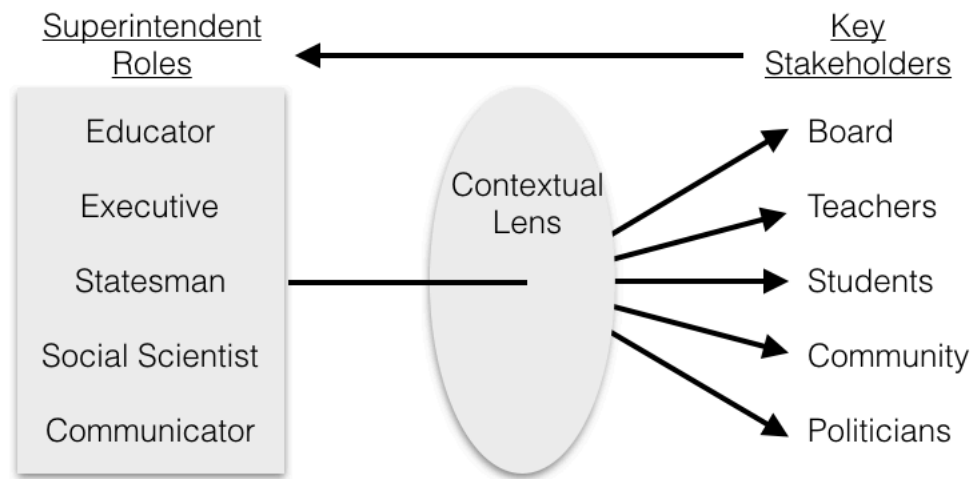


Figure 1

Figure 1. Superintendent Role Manifestation Conceptual Framework. This illustration explains the manner in which expectations influence the performance of roles within the superintendency.

Figure 1 shows the various roles that may be associated with the superintendency on the left. These include the five conceptualizations put forth by Callahan (1966) and Kowalski (2005). On the right side of the image are the various stakeholders who are associated with the superintendency: the school board, teachers within the district, students, community members, and politicians. Employing tenets of role theory, I conceptualize that the roles that are manifest by superintendents both influence and are influenced by the key stakeholders. As an example, the superintendent will discuss a political issue, such as the Common Core State Standards, differently with different audiences. If the superintendent is talking with a politician, he or she will filter the message through the contextual lens that is appropriate for that audience. Likewise, if he or she is talking to a parent or a teacher about the same topic, the context will shift and, therefore, his or her discursive nature will shift as well.

Furthermore, for each superintendent the socially expected norms and practices will vary based upon context. In the conceptual framework above, I have included a contextual lens through which all communication is filtered. Context, in this sense, is related to all aspects of the superintendent's job. Therefore, as contexts change, the message will change. As the stakeholders co-create the role expectations of the superintendency, the individuals filling the role must understand the complex dynamics that exist within the community and make informed decisions to fulfill his or her role appropriately.

This conceptual framework is pertinent to this study because it provides a means to employ the theoretical and philosophical orientations that I hold to the conceptual understandings of superintendent practice. While I believe this conceptual framework provides a useful analysis of traditional superintendent engagement and image creation, I hypothesize that it is not applicable to superintendents' use of Twitter. I will explore this hypothesis in further depth in the conclusion of this study.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that scholars have provided a useful framework to guide our understanding of the roles associated with the superintendency. Additionally, there is a well-developed research base exploring the political nature of the superintendent and a nascent, but strong, literature base exploring the use of Twitter within the superintendency. Yet, there is a gap in the literature exploring the intersection of the superintendency, politics, and Twitter. I have also put forth the basis of social constructionism, poststructuralism, and role theory as means to propose a conceptual framework that I have employed in my understanding of the superintendency. In the

following chapter, I will turn to the question of methodology and articulate how my choice in discourse analysis and discourse elicitation methodology are particularly useful in answering my research questions.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Social technologies have significantly changed the way public figures interact with and influence the public at large. For politicians and other public figures, social media has been both an opportunity and a potential liability. On one hand, it allows for easy communication with a broad array of constituents. On the other hand, however, the permanent nature of shared information, lack of control, and potential for out-of-context interpretations may cause detrimental results.

For school superintendents, navigating online engagement has the potential to be even trickier. Superintendents work in politically charged environments, oftentimes buffeted by the desires and demands of elected officials, special interest groups, board members, and community constituents at large (Björk & Keedy, 2001; Kowalski, 2006). Despite this complexity, many superintendents choose to participate on social media platforms.

This study seeks to better understand how superintendents are using social media. In particular, this study examines how superintendents engage in political discourse on the social media platform Twitter. The importance of such a study lies in the realization that as means for communicating with the public and community constituents evolve, the practices and methods for engaging with the public by school superintendents must also evolve. Furthermore, social media platforms, such as Twitter, allow for a single point of communication, reaching teachers, parents, students, community members, colleagues, and political officials.

In this chapter, I will focus on the two phases of analysis employed in this study. I begin by identifying the three research questions driving the methodological choices for this study. Next, I will address the research design specifically, including an explanation of the analytical choices and procedural decisions. Finally, I will outline the limitations inherent to the study, key terms, and outline the remaining chapters.

Research Questions

Twitter has become a useful tool for school leaders to quickly and broadly communicate information with key stakeholders. Generally, this is a positive development as it allows leaders to promote the district and share pertinent information, such as school closings, with a very wide audience. At the same time, superintendents are expected, and do, engage in political topics as part of their job. I believe there are potential areas for concern when superintendents' engagement in political discourse intersects with their use of Twitter. Might their discussion of political topics alienate key stakeholders – including parents, teachers, students, board, community members, or politicians associated with the district? Might their discussion of political topics be misinterpreted or taken out of context? Might their political discussion have ramifications from their board?

These questions drove me explore the intersection of the superintendency, politics, and Twitter in more depth. To accomplish this, I developed three research questions to drive this study:

- 1) Do superintendents engage in macro-political discourse on Twitter?
- 2) What is the discursive nature of superintendents' macro-political discourse on Twitter?

3) How do superintendents characterize their own Twitter use for macro-political engagement?

In order to answer the first two questions, I employed discourse analysis techniques on the tweets of a selected subset of superintendents on Twitter. The third research question required a different methodological approach as it sought to understand nature of superintendent discourse from the perspective of the superintendents themselves. To this end, I purposefully selected a sample of 7 participants from the original dataset and conducted semi-structured interviews, using a modified form of photo-elicitation methodology (Harper, 2002), which I am referring to as discourse elicitation.

Research Design

As noted above, the research questions guiding this study necessitated two phases of analysis. The first phase of analysis consisted of an in-depth analysis of the political dialogue of superintendents on Twitter. This phase used a form of discourse analysis named discursive psychology (Potter & Wetherell, 1992). The second phase consisted of semi-structured interviews with a purposefully sampled group of superintendents utilizing a modified photo-elicitation methodology. In the following section, I will discuss each methodological approach and its application in this study.

Discourse Analysis and Discursive Psychology

Discourse analysis has come to be a blanket term used to describe any methodological examination of the way language interacts with the social world (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Potter & Wetherell, 1992). This broad appropriation of the term is due largely to the fact that variant forms of discourse

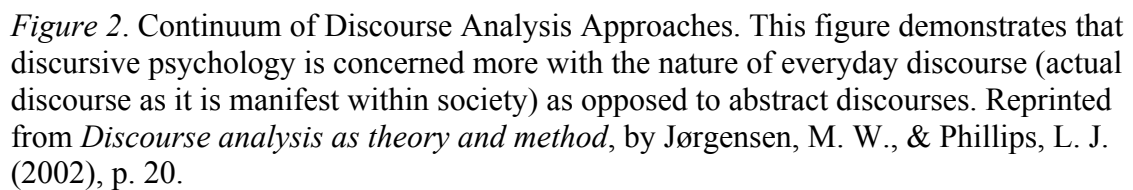
analysis have emerged simultaneously in a number of different fields. Psychology, sociology, linguistics, anthropology, literary studies, philosophy, media, and communication studies have all claimed some form of discourse analysis; all of which grounded their approach in varying philosophical and theoretical perspectives (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). For this reason, the ability to define the historical perspective and academic tradition that one adopts is critical to using discourse analysis as an analytical method.

I have chosen to adopt a variant of discourse analysis known as discursive psychology for this study, which has arisen over the last half century from the field of social psychology (Potter & Wetherell, 1992). Discursive psychology is distinguished from other forms of discourse analysis in that it is focused on the ways cognitive notions, such as identity or role fulfillment, can be treated analytically (Wooffitt, 2005). In the following sections, I will identify the academic traditions and key components of discursive psychology. I will then outline how the methodology has been applied in previous studies that are relevant to my own.

Defining Discourse

Before exploring the methodological aspects of discourse analysis, it would prove helpful to first operationalize the term discourse. Among discourse analysts there is little agreement regarding the nature and scope of discourse. I have adopted an expansive definition for discourse which includes not only traditional talk and text but also semiotic representations. This is important because in a medium such as Twitter the choices of imagery and page format may convey as powerful of a message as the actual text constructed by the participant. For the purposes of this study, the choice of profile photo

My definition of discourse is grounded in the relationship between the talk and text and the individual and context in which it is constructed. This concept is potentially tricky and is best illustrated by Jørgensen and Phillips (2002).



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This distinction is important because it posits that there is power in the individual to construct meaning and context through the discursive practices in which he or she engages. One might draw upon larger global narratives, such as patriotism or justice, but those concepts are given meaning and purpose through his or her discursive practices. Therefore, throughout this study I have been purposeful to first and foremost analyze the specific talk, text, and imagery created by the participants.

Discursive Psychology

Discursive psychology is a distinct approach to discourse analysis that is grounded in the field and practice of social psychology. Pioneered by Derek Edwards, Jonathan Potter, and Margaret Wetherell, discursive psychology emerged as a critique of many of the precepts of cognitive psychology, which viewed language either as a reflection of global societal realities or inner mental processes (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1992). In contrast, discursive psychology takes a social constructionist stance, which questions the reality of inner cognitive functions and challenges the stability of global realities.

Discursive psychology views language use as purposeful constructions oriented towards social action (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). As such, discursive psychologists believe all discourse to be purposeful and constructive in nature. One way that discursive psychologists come to understand this nature is through critical moments in discursive practice. That is, discursive psychology is concerned with anomalies of discourse and the ways in which “people’s active and creative use of discourse as a resource for accomplishing social actions in specific contexts of interactions” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 21).

Wood and Kroger (2000) identified three aspects that distinguish a methodological approach that uses discursive psychology. For them, the discourse analyst places: “(a) an emphasis on talk as action, (b) an emphasis on talk as the event of interest, and (c) an emphasis on variability” (p. 18). An emphasis on talk as action is, in many ways, unique to discursive psychology. For the discourse analyst, a distinction lies between “talk as words, and talk as what people are doing with words” (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 5). In other words, talk does not exist outside of purpose; all language is purposeful and constructive

As discursive psychology is a variant of discourse analysis, the literature often uses the two terms interchangeably. For consistency, future use of the term discourse analysis generally will be in reference to this particular strand of discourse analysis unless otherwise noted.

Methodological Roots of Discourse Analysis

The methodological roots of discourse analysis may be found in conversation analysis. Conversation analysis is an ethnomethodological approach to discourse that examines everyday talk in social interaction (Augoustinos et al., 2014; Sacks, 1992). As an approach to discourse, conversation analysis focuses heavily on the organization of talk, such as turn-taking patterns and conversational repairs, that individuals use to navigate social interaction (Wooffitt, 2005). However, such a mechanistic approach has led to a rather limited perspective on language. Conversation analysts constrain their analyses to the talk and text at hand and do not concern themselves with larger societal discourses or semiotic imagery.

While discourse analysis draws heavily on the foundational understanding and methodological approaches of conversation analysis, discourse analysis diverged from conversation analysis in two important ways. First, discourse analysis incorporated many of the continental approaches to discourse presented by Michel Foucault (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). This incorporation has led discourse analysts to look beyond the practical back-and-forth of discourse to large meta-narrative and psychological perspectives inherent in practice. For instance, building upon the poststructuralist approach to language, the historical and cultural specificity holds significant impact for the nature of language and therefore influences the discursive practices that emerge between individuals.

This awareness directly impacted the second divergence of discourse analysis; namely a focus on rhetorical organization as a strategy to counter alternative positions or arguments (Billig, 1991). Discourse analysis accounts for the purposeful nature of discourse and seeks to understand the tools and resources upon which individuals draw to better their arguments. It posits that discourse is oriented toward social action and bound by the rhetorical context in which they are occasioned (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Philosophical Roots of Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is unique as a methodology in that theory and method are inexorably intertwined. For this reason, Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) referred to discourse analysis as a “complete package,” noting “it is not to be used as a method of analysis detached from its theoretical and methodological foundations” (pp. 3-4).

Furthermore, Potter (2011) noted, “this is not just a method; it is a broad approach to

social life that combines meta-theoretical assumptions, theoretical ideas, analytic orientations and bodies of work” (p. 188).

Therefore, it is necessary to unpack key philosophical perspectives related to discourse analysis. Many philosophical traditions have had significant impact upon the development and practice of discourse analysis as a methodology, including Marxism, structuralism, post-modernism, and anti-essentialism (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). The two philosophical traditions most closely associated with discursive psychology, however, are social constructionism and poststructuralism (Augoustinos et al., 2014). Since I have addressed the core concepts of social constructionism and poststructuralism in Chapter 2, I will now provide a brief overview of each and apply their principles to the practice of discourse analysis.

Social constructionism is a philosophical approach to the nature of knowledge that emerged in opposition to positive and essentialist perspectives. It holds that knowledge is historically and culturally situated, largely constituted through social interaction between and among individuals (Burr, 2003). Language is the cornerstone upon which the social constructionist perspective is built. As Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) noted, it is discourses that “create a world that looks real and true for the speaker” (p. 103).

Within the social constructionist perspective, language not only describes an experience, but provides meaning, which ultimately is contributive to the overall experience (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). This is an important distinction for discourse analysis because it posits that language is action-oriented. In other words, language *does* something rather than simply *describing* something. Therefore, when analyzing talk and

text is necessary to look beyond the individual words set forth and seek a deeper understanding of the purposeful nature of the discourse.

The poststructuralist approach to the language takes its starting place from the structuralist idea that language and meanings are stable, socially constructed ideas. For the structuralist, words are given their meaning from their relation to other words. For the poststructuralist perspective, however, word-meaning is contextually relevant and therefore not stable. For instance, the word 'work' has different meanings whether it is in contrast to the word 'leisure' or the word 'passivity' (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). This holds significant importance for the discourse analyst because it requires another broader level of analysis; one in which not only the presented talk and text are relevant for analysis, but also the large societal discourses and that talk and text that is not explicitly provided.

Discursive Psychology Analytical Process

It is not uncommon for variant methodologies of discourse analysis to provide complex philosophical frameworks, but lack formalized methodological steps for analysis. For instance, the discourse theory put forth by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe has an incredibly well-reasoned philosophical perspective regarding language and the abstract nature of socially developed discourses, but provides no guidance on the actual steps of analysis (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). The discursive psychology approach of Potter and Wetherell (1992), however, provides a framework for conducting discourse analysis studies. While their framework includes 10 stages of the analysis process, I employed six stages as some stages did not fit methodologically with the content I examined. These six stages of analysis were: development of research

questions, sample selection, data collection, coding, analysis, and report and application. In this section, I will briefly address each of these stages and their impact on the development of this study.

Development of research questions. Discourse analysis begins with a central question or problem to be answered. Discourse analysis questions, however, are distinct in that they approach texts “in their own right,” meaning language is the unit of study itself, not a route to things behind the text, such as “attitudes, events or cognitive processes” (Potter & Wetherell, 1992, p. 160). This does not mean, however, that the impact of discursive practices on larger societal issues cannot be analyzed. Instead, the research question should seek to understand how “people, through discursive practice, create constructions of the world, groups and identities” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 119).

Such an approach is a divergent from many qualitative studies, wherein interviews or textual analysis would position the creator of the language as the unit of study. Therefore, as it relates to this study, the unit of analysis within the discourse analysis section is solely the construction of macro-political discourse on Twitter, not the individual superintendents behind the text. Such a shift has repercussions not just on the data itself, but also the sample from which the data is constructed.

Sample selection. For discourse analysis sample size is relatively unimportant to the success of the overall study (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Potter & Wetherell, 1992). This is due, in part, to the fact that the individuals are not the unit of investigation, but the texts are. Therefore, ample textual examples for analysis are of the utmost importance. A second reason sample size is relatively unimportant to discourse analysts is the realization

that findings are not intended to be generalizable. Instead, the findings of discourse analysis studies represent historically and culturally specific talk and text, constructed in a moment of time that may illuminate how language is used.

For the purposes of this study, decisions regarding sample size were driven largely by the amount of text needed for analysis. It was not uncommon to have one superintendent with a Twitter feed of several thousand tweets and another with only a few hundred. Therefore, using a concrete number of accounts was not as meaningful as pulling the actual text and analyzing the complete dataset before deciding whether more information was needed.

Data collection. The source of data collection is incredibly important to discourse analysis. The researcher must be able to justify the chosen data set not only as a justifiable unit of measurement, but also from a methodological perspective. Recent shifts in discourse analysis as a whole have begun to privilege the existence of naturally occurring data as opposed to interview or survey data (Potter, 2011). My choice of Twitter is a unique and particularly interesting data source as it is point-in-time, naturally occurring data that has been archived. The field of discourse analysis is increasingly exploring the role of computer-mediated communication, finding online communication allows for unique discursive construction in asynchronous and synchronous platforms. Within that subfield, there are very few studies applying discourse analysis techniques to Twitter specifically.

Coding. Following the collection of data, the analyst next begins a process of coding. Potter and Wetherell (1992) do not consider coding as analysis per se, but a strategy to chunk discourse into manageable units for analysis. Through coding, themes

are identified as they emerge in the dataset. This process may require several readings and deletion and addition of codes in a multistep process. Coding as a process is emergent, meaning there are relatively few strategies in place to guide the analyst through the process. Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) noted that one fruitful technique of past studies has been to search for conversational crisis points or shifts in pronoun usage as points of interest for coding.

Analysis. Once a complete set of codes has been created, the researcher may begin analysis. This is an incredibly labor intensive process and requires a great deal of time spent reading, analyzing and comparing texts (Potter & Wetherell, 1992). Unfortunately, there is no clear guidance in how analysis should occur. Potter and Wetherell (1992) compared the process of analysis to riding a bicycle, where words fail to fully capture the complexity of the process. They stated, “often it is only after long hours struggling with the data and many false starts that a systematic patterning emerges” (p. 168).

While there is no precise guidebook for analysis, there exist concepts that may prove helpful in the analysis phase. Ideas, such as interpretative repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1992), stake inoculation (Edwards & Potter, 1992) and rhetorical argumentation (Billig, 1996), are all common discursive strategies that have come from previous studies. I have used these concepts as resources to frame my own analysis, to not only position my findings within the larger literature base of discourse analysis but to also providing a starting point for analysis in what otherwise might be a daunting process.

Report and application. Finally, discourse analysis is concerned with relating findings to impact change. Therefore, discourse analysis studies should not only be

reported upon, but also applied to the field. While this is difficult to achieve in some instances, I see this aspect of the study as incredibly important. Superintendents should better understand the discursive strategies being used, or those that might be available to them, as they engage with the public through open social media platforms such as Twitter. Furthermore, the evolution of superintendent discursive practice has important implications for the field's understanding of the nature of the superintendency. Therefore, linking findings to conceptual understandings of practice has significant implications too.

Analytical Process

I drew upon the analytical considerations outlined by Potter and Wetherell (1992) as a starting point for the analytical process for this study. My first step in analysis was to identify a population and sample for analysis. An initial database of superintendents was constructed by adding participants from the Twitter hashtag, #suptchat, and following an already developed, public list of superintendents constructed by Kevin Case (@KevinCase253)¹. Kevin Case's Twitter List of superintendents consisted of 814 superintendents when the initial data set was pulled. I used the software, TwExlist (Docteur Tweety, 2015) to export all members of the list to an Excel database, which included information about each account. From this list, I conducted an initial scan of participants for the purposes of narrowing down my sample.

Two considerations were given to the nature of that sample. First, I had to make a decision regarding the time frame of analysis and second the defining characteristics that would qualify participants for analysis. With respect to the timeline, the nature of the topic being analyzed influenced my decision greatly. At the time of the initial analysis, the United States was amid one of the most antagonistic presidential elections ever.

Twitter became a platform for much of the dialogue concerning the primaries and election. Therefore, I made a purposeful decision to seek a point in history that was less influenced by a contentious macro-political environment. It was my hope that this might allow for a better understanding of everyday practice of superintendents. An additional benefit of looking at historical tweets allowed for the topics being discussed, particularly in the second phase of analysis, to be further removed from practice, and therefore less sensitive for superintendents to discuss. Therefore, I chose the academic school year of 2014-15. I therefore constrained my dataset to only those superintendents that had an account between August 1, 2014 and June 30, 2015.

Previous studies of Twitter have given great thought to the defining characteristics used to qualify participants for analysis. For instance, Veletsianos (2012) developed the following criteria for participant inclusion. Users must:

- Have a public Twitter profile,
- Have a Twitter network with more than 2,000 followers,
- Have an active presence on Twitter, and
- Have a K-12 school title in his or her Twitter profile.

Other studies have modified particular criteria. Sauers and Richardson (2015) included a requirement that participants have tweeted more than once per week, while Cho (2013) included only participants that had more than 100 tweets in their history.

I purposefully chose not to include such criteria for this study. The rationale was based largely on theoretical considerations. From a discourse analysis perspective, the unit of study is the discourse, not the individual constructing the discourse. As such, a single tweet from a superintendent adds to the larger body of discourse. Furthermore, in

¹ The public list is available at: <https://twitter.com/KevinCase253/lists/superintendentstofollow>

some ways, from an analytical perspective, that single tweet may be more illuminating than a random tweet from an account with 5,000 other examples. The act of the single tweet was purposive and unique; therefore, it is a critical shift that indicates something worth analyzing.

That is not to say there were not any criteria for inclusion, however. I set forth two criteria that were critical to the analysis. First, all participants must have been users of Twitter within the entirety of the analysis range and the users must have self-identified as superintendents within their profile. I removed all superintendents who had not created a Twitter account before the initial date in my analysis range (August 1, 2014). Next, I analyzed all of the biographies that the participants had provided for their Twitter profile. I made the decision to only include those superintendents who explicitly stated their role as superintendent within their profile in this dataset. The rationale for this decision was that this required a clear, explicit statement of their role and affirmed their position outside of their inclusion in the initial list. This left me with a total database of 570 superintendents.

Analysis proceeded in four steps. First, a random number generator was used to reorder the catalog of 570 superintendents. After this was complete, I utilized Nvivo for Mac (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2015) and the web browser extension, NCapture for Nvivo, to capture all tweets and retweets for the first 10 identified superintendents. This process automatically populated an Nvivo dataset where I limited samples to those that were shared between August 1, 2014 and June 30, 2015. After three rounds of this process a total dataset of 16,658 tweets were included in the dataset. I decided at this point that more than 15,000 tweets should provide a clear indication of practice.

The second step of analysis was a broad scan of all tweets, coding those that were political in nature. For the purposes of this study, I defined political as any tweet that referenced: politicians, legislation, educational policy, non-educational policy, and politically sensitive topics (e.g., Supreme Court rulings). Following the process outlined by Potter and Wetherell (1992), initial coding was not intended to analyze practice, but was used as a resource for chunking practice and delimiting my analysis. This coding process identified 1,619 tweets as political in nature.

Step three of the analysis process included reading closely only those tweets that had previously been coded as political. After several close readings of all tweets, meta-themes began to emerge. It became clear that there were two broad categories of tweets within the dataset: those that were constructed by the individual and those that were shared content (re-tweets and link sharing). Therefore, a second round of coding was conducted in Nvivo in which all tweets were categorized as either “Updates and Conversations” or “Retweets and Sharing.” The codebook used to guide both the second and third steps of analysis may be found in Appendix C.

Finally, in-depth analysis proceeded upon each of the two categories of political tweets. Analysis included several in-depth readings of the entire dataset in an attempt to understand emergent themes. Throughout this process I engaged in memoing as a process to capture ideas while reading the Twitter feeds (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). I paid particular attention to rhetorical strategies and critical incidents as a point for deeper analysis. After several close readings, themes began to emerge within each of the datasets that characterized practice, which became the themes and key findings that I present below.

Validity

It is important to attend to how one, as an analyst, warrants claims in discourse analysis. Potter (1996) noted four possible ways the discursive psychology analysts might warrant claims: 1) attending to participant orientations; 2) attending to deviant cases; 3) coherence and 4) reader evaluation. This study will warrant claims through attending to deviant cases and reader evaluation.

At its core, this study was an analysis of deviant cases. The discussion of political topics by superintendents is abnormal according to our institutional expectations and the roles associated with practice. Therefore, those tweets that do address policy and/or politics challenge our assumptions of the field and deviate from normal superintendent discourse.

In addition, I have sought to warrant claims throughout by attending to reader evaluation. Reader evaluation “both results from and is encouraged by the greater transparency of discourse-analytic work” (Wood and Kroger, 2000, p. 168). As such I have sought to clearly articulate the analytic process inherent to this study and to be reflective throughout regarding my own internal biases and understandings of the texts at hand. A first step in such an approach is to clarify the perspective I bring to the research through a positionality statement.

Positionality

Alcoff (2005) posited the concept of positionality as a means to clearly identify the perspectival influences that act upon the research at hand. While Alcoff traditionally applied this concept to gender studies from a critical feminist lens, any study appropriating a social constructivist lens, particularly one utilizing discourse analysis as a

methodological framework, may benefit from clearly articulating the researcher's positionality. Therefore, I will attempt to expound upon my own positionality as it relates to the study at hand.

I come to this research with a social constructionist positionality. I adhere to Burr's (2003) four premises embraced by social constructionists: employ critical approach to taken-for-granted knowledge; knowledge is historical and culturally specific; there is a link between knowledge and social processes; and there is a link between knowledge and social action. The historical and cultural specificity is primary to my philosophical grounding in this study. Through this lens, the I positions my understanding of social reality as historically situated. Therefore, there is no enduring reality and all social understandings are contingent (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

This positionality has repercussions on the subject at hand because in studying the political advocacy of the superintendency, I take the position that one's identity and performance as a superintendent is a construct. I believe that the nature of this construct can be better understood through the actions, talk and text produced by individuals. Therefore, in this study, I seek to employ a discursive psychology approach to understand how superintendents construct their roles as democratic leaders through online discourse.

Discourse Elicitation Methodology

While studying the relation between environment and mental health in the mid-1950s, John Collier began to question how photographic evidence might be applied directly to research efforts (Harper, 2002). The result was a study that sought to understand whether photographs could be used as more than just illustrations and be

directly applied to research efforts (Collier, 1957). The resultant study was the first application of a methodology that would come to be known as photo-elicitation.

Today photo-elicitation is a core component of a small field known as visual sociology. While photo-elicitation has become an accepted methodological approach, it is still relatively unknown. As Harper (2002) noted, the potential usefulness of photo-elicitations is “huge,” though for the most part “largely unrecognized” (p. 14). This lack of recognition may, in part, be due to the fact that some might view photographically driven studies as lacking in rigor. Such a perspective misinterprets the true intent of the method. As Clark-Ibáñez (2004) noted “there is nothing inherently interesting about photographs; instead, photographs act as a medium of communication between research and participant” (p. 1512). With this consideration in mind, photo-elicitation is just another way of conducting traditional interviews.

In its most basic form, photo-elicitation is the application of photographic imagery to a research interview (Harper, 2002). This application, however, performs many complex tasks. While Harper (2002) made a case for all of the various aspects of photo-elicitation, I will to address two key components of the methodology that are particularly relevant to the study at hand.

A key rationale for the inclusion of images to prompt discussion in photo-elicitation methodology is the realization that on a biological level, humans react differently to images than they do to words. For instance, Harper (2002) noted humans are evolutionarily predisposed to process imagery better than words. In short, “images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words” (Harper, 2002, p. 14). The inclusion of images as a prompt for discussion grounds the participants in time,

place, and emotion of the image, which has the potential to result in clearer, deeper recollection of past events and to place the interviewee in a former mind-space.

The second component of photo-elicitation that particularly suits it for this study relates to issues of power. Photo-elicitation is a strategy to recast traditional open-ended interviews (Lapenta, 2011). By inserting an image into the conversation, though, the dynamic between the interviewer and the interviewee is shifted. The point of focus now becomes the image, which has the potential to change power dynamics.

There is relatively little research regarding the asymmetrical power dynamics that emerge from traditional interview processes. Nunkoosing (2005) noted that in traditional interviews, the interviewer naturally possesses power as the seeker of information. Photo-elicitation seeks to change this paradigm by favoring collaboration between the interviewer and the interviewee (Lapenta, 2011). Images become “communication bridges between people” (Collier & Collier, 1986, p. 99), which might serve to encourage richer, deeper conversations around the topic of interest. Thus, the value in photo-elicitation lies not in the photos themselves, but the philosophical space created between the researcher and the participant.

The literature base of photo-elicitation is relatively small and consists primarily of studies in anthropology. That being said, photo-elicitation has been applied to other fields of research, including studies of health (Olfiffe & Bottorff, 2007), education (Rasmussen, 2004; Smith & Woodward, 1999), children’s health (Epstein, Stevens, McKeever, & Baruchel, 2006), and social work (Weinger, 1998).

Methodological Considerations

Before any photo-elicitation study can begin, three key questions must be addressed. First, a decision must be made regarding the kinds of photos used. Second, how the photos will be selected must be decided. Finally, the site and strategy for interviewing must be decided (Lapenta, 2011). In this section, I will address some of the primary concerns regarding each of these questions and put forth my own answers within my study.

Selecting the content of the images is of primary importance. Historically photo-elicitation studies have relied on traditional photographs. Harper (2002) noted, however, this is not necessarily a requirement. He explained, “most elicitation studies use photographs, but there is no reason studies cannot be done with paintings, cartoons, public displays such as graffiti or advertising billboards or virtually any visual image” (Harper, 2002, p 13). Though Harper (2002) notes to his knowledge, only one study has been conducted examining textual references in images. This study was an analysis of graffiti and paintings on low-riders conducted with Latino youth (Cowan, 1999).

With respect to this study, tweets are an interesting combination of text and imagery. Text is critical to the construction of a tweet, but once created, the tweet may stand alone as an image. Furthermore, many tweets also contain images. It is not uncommon to find superintendents who have tweeted photographs of themselves at the state house or other politically charged environments. For this reason, I think the choice to use tweets as the conversational impetus within photo-elicitation is not only compelling, but it has the potential to expand the methodological base.

The second question that must be answered regards how images will be selected. Since I purposefully selected interview participants from the initial analysis process, I chose tweets that represented unique Twitter activity. I was aware that the process of me, as the researcher, searching the participants Twitter feed to find instances of macro-political engagement and then presenting them to the interviewee could present problems related to power dynamics. Therefore, I split the responsibility with the interviewee and ask they bring instances from their own feed and I brought instances I found particularly interesting, as well. My hope was to mitigate any issues of power through this process.

Finally, because of time and financial considerations I relied upon the internet as an avenue to conduct interviews. Participants were encouraged to participate in interviews using Zoom, a video conferencing software (<http://www.zoom.us>). Some participants indicated their computers did not have video capability, however. Therefore, I utilized Skype (<http://www.skype.com>). as an alternative interview platform in those cases. All interviews were recorded locally onto my computer using Echo360 (<http://www.echo360.com>).

Discourse Elicitation

While photo-elicitation methodology has been used previously, I used the core principals of the methodology in a distinct way. Whereas photo-elicitation has historically used imagery to solicit topics of conversation, I used images of discourse for that purpose. For that reason, I am referring to this appropriation of the method as discourse elicitation. Like photo-elicitation, my appropriation of discourse elicitation will utilize discursive prompts as an entry into semi-structured interviews. Instead of photographs, however, text will be presented as the prompt for discussion. Such an

approach is particularly well-suited to analyses of social media where short, narrative texts are isolated and able to be discussed as stand-alone resources yet the iconography and format of text might have powerful symbolic meaning to the user.

Analytical Process

The sample of 30 superintendents from the discourse analysis phase of this study served as the sample for second phase of analysis as well. This decision was made for two reasons: (a) I already had a constructed database of the superintendents' tweets which could serve as a resource for identifying tweets for the interview, and (b) I could draw upon particular practice from the initial phase to identify specific individuals that I wanted to interview. From that list, I began by purposefully constructing a sample frame of 10 superintendents for interview using critical case sampling (Hatch, 2002). I looked closely at the activity presented during the discourse analysis phase of this study and selected 10 superintendents who were the most active and engaged in the primary themes that emerged from the analysis. Participant recruitment included an email solicitation for participation in one 30-minute interview. This email solicitation was sent to each of the superintendents at their district or university email address.

After one week, I had only received responses from four individuals, therefore I decided to expand the sample frame to 20 participants. From this list of 20 individuals, seven superintendents agreed to participate in an interview, six men and one woman. Participants were dispersed across the Midwest and Northeast sections of the country, including New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Minnesota, Vermont, and Virginia.

All of the participants were superintendents during the sample timeframe (August 1, 2014 – June 30, 2015), though some had since taken new positions. One participant

now served as a university professor in an educational leadership department. Another participant moved on to different role outside of the superintendency, serving as a regional service provider assisting other superintendents. These two non-practicing superintendents were able to reflect back on their roles as superintendents and their Twitter usage, which provided a unique insight.

After participants agreed to be interviewed, each was provided the option of either conducting the interview via Zoom Video Conferencing (<https://zoom.us>) or on Skype (<http://www.skype.com>). Additionally, participants were given instructions prior to the scheduled interview regarding expectations of the discussion. A date and time was arranged and I provided each participant with a document that included all of their own tweets coded as political from within the dataset. Each participant was asked to review the dataset prior to our conversation and choose five instances of tweets that they thought characterized their approach to macro-political engagement on Twitter.

I adapted a photo-elicitation interview protocol developed by Hatten, Forin, and Adams (2013) (Appendix D). At the beginning of all interviews I asked participants if there were any objections to me recording our discussion for transcription purposes. I described to each participant that their opinions would be anonymous.

Following the completion of all seven interviews, I transcribed the audio recordings manually. Transcriptions were uploaded to Nvivo for Mac (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2015) for analysis. Analysis began by reading each transcript closely while looking for emergent themes. Next I developed a code book that included five dominant themes and several subthemes. I then read all of the transcripts again and began to apply codes. Once I had completed coding every transcript, I exported all of the coded

selections and began to draft a narrative that described the essential findings in a cohesive manner.

Delimitations / Limitations

Although I believe the methodological choices for this study are the best choices to answer the research questions, there still exist limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the employment of discourse analysis as a methodological approach has inherent limitations. It is important to note discourse analysts do not seek to provide any generalizable conclusions, but instead explore phenomena as it occurs naturally through talk and text. As such, I cannot claim the findings and results of this study are indicative of practices across the field of the superintendency; only that at a given point in time it did occur and should be acknowledged as being relevant.

Secondly, the sample included in the study is a subset of a population and may not reflect broader practice. Without a systematic way to catalogue every superintendent active on Twitter, any database will inherently be flawed. The sample included was rather small.

Thirdly, the timeframe for analysis encompassed a period in which many political topics were pervasive in popular culture. Topics like the Common Core, PARCC, Smarter Balanced Assessment, and testing generally were household discussions at that time. These topics will continue to change and evolve and as they do so will superintendent practice. I did make a conscious decision to avoid analyze activity from the 2014-15 academic year because I hoped to avoid the vitriolic political discourse that characterized the presidential election of 2016 on Twitter. I believed that the nature of political discourse on Twitter would return to normalcy and the election was simply a

punctuation in practice. Unfortunately, I do not think that belief is accurate. In fact, I had one participant from the discourse elicitation phase of the study indicate that he had really stopped using Twitter because of hateful nature of political discourse on the platform now.

Finally, I, as the researcher, have brought with me particular biases that may have influenced the data analysis. Of course, the identification of political tweets has a certain element of subjectivity, however, at the time of data analysis I worked professionally within a political subsystem that interacted with many of the topics discussed by superintendents on a daily basis. This insider perspective has allowed me to see certain topics as political whereas others may not. Furthermore, this could lead to an over-bias wherein a topic that a superintendent might not characterize as political I would.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the theoretical and methodological considerations that informed the development of this study. I also provided an outline of the steps of analysis for both the discourse analysis and discourse elicitation phases of the study. In both phases, I have built upon existing practice and have attempted to situate this study as an extension of practice. In the next chapter I will present the findings from the discourse analysis phase of the study.

CHAPTER 4: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

This study examined the occurrence of political discourse by superintendents on Twitter. In order to accomplish this, I have employed two methodological approaches. The first, discourse analysis, examined the nature of the constructed text itself. This provided a unique insight into the discursive constructions of superintendents, but did not presume to analyze the actors behind the text. Therefore, I also employed discourse elicitation methodology as a means to dive deeper into the practice of political tweeting by superintendents. This second methodological approach included seven semi-structured interviews with superintendents in which their political tweets were used as a frame of reference to discuss the practice and nature of political engagement on Twitter.

In this chapter, I present the findings from the first methodological approach to the study, discourse analysis. I begin by providing a summary of the participants who comprise the pool of tweets analyzed in the study. Next, I attend to the specific research questions addressed in this chapter. I then present and analyze the primary themes and findings from the analysis process. I conclude this chapter with a summary and an introduction to the second stage of analysis to be presented in Chapter 5.

Participants

Analysis began with the construction of a database of active superintendents on Twitter. As noted in Chapter 3, this was accomplished through existing Twitter lists and analyzing popular superintendent chat hashtags. An initial list of 814 superintendents was constructed, but quickly narrowed to 570 as I rejected all accounts that did not clearly indicate the individual's role as a superintendent or that were not active during the time period of analysis. I uploaded all 570 superintendents into an Excel file and assigned each

participant an ordered number. I then used a random number generator to identify 10 random numbers between one and 570. Those 10 numbers were used to identify my first 10 participants for analysis. Sauers and Richardson (2015) and Cho (2013) found that school leaders tweet about educational policy issues, though such tweets constituted a small percentage of all of their tweets. For this reason, I made a decision to set my initial dataset threshold at 15,000 tweets. If the superintendents in my dataset had tweeted about policy or politics at least 8% of the time, which is the frequency that Cho found, that would provide more than 1,000 tweets in a secondary dataset of political tweets.

After three rounds of sampling I had constructed a database of 30 superintendents. These 30 superintendents accounted for 16,658 tweets. Therefore, having met my criteria, the tweets of these superintendents constituted my initial dataset and I began my analysis and planned to expand, if needed, in the future.

Discourse analysis does not define the subject of analysis as the individual participant. Instead, the primary unit of analysis is the talk and text constructed by the participant (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Nevertheless, it may prove useful to provide some basic information regarding the participants who constituted the sample of 30 superintendents.

The 30 superintendents included in the sample represented districts from across the U.S. As can be seen in Table 1, 80 percent of superintendents in the sample were men (24 out of 30), 16 percent were female (5 out of 30), and three percent were unknown (1 out of 30). This sample roughly aligned to the overall population of the data set, wherein 77.8% of accounts were men, 20.4% were women, and 1.8% were unknown. Furthermore, these data align with Grogan and Brunner (2005) finding that roughly 18

percent of school districts are led by female superintendents.

Table 1

Gender Representation in the Dataset

	Men (24)	Women (5)	Unknown (1)
Total # of Tweets	13,943	2,661	54
Percentage of Tweets in the Dataset	83.7%	15.97%	.32%
Average Tweets per Individual	580.95	532.2	54
Median Total Tweets	317.5	82	54

While this study does not examine the gendered differences in either political discourse or tweeting, it is worth noting the distinction between the average tweets and median tweets across men and women. When viewed as a whole, the average number of tweets per individual within the dataset is relatively similar across genders. On average, regardless of gender, each superintendent contributed well over 500 tweets. However, the median number of tweets per superintendent tells a very different story. The inclusion of a median is useful because the median is less sensitive to outliers than the mean. In both cases, it is clear that there are individuals who tweet significantly more than their peers, which skews the mean. For women, however, the median is incredibly low at 82. This is because there were two participants who comprised 96% of all tweets. This is a surprising finding and outside the scope of this particular study, but certainly worthy of further investigation.

I have made the decision to remove the Twitter handle of all of the superintendents that I have analyzed within this study. A case could be made that this was an unnecessary step since all of the tweets are publicly available, however, as I was analyzing specifically their political tweets and looking for critical instances, I decided

that I felt most comfortable with taking this extra precaution. With the exception of the removal of the Twitter handle, all tweets below exist exactly as they were presented on Twitter initially.

Research Questions

The research questions posed at the outset of this study have informed the methodological considerations outlined above. Three distinct questions were posed:

- 1) Do superintendents engage in macro-political discourse on Twitter?
- 2) What discursive strategies are superintendents employing when discussing macro-political discourse on Twitter? And
- 3) How do superintendents characterize their own Twitter use for macro-political engagement?

The dataset that I outlined above and the principles of discourse analysis will be utilized to answer both research questions one and two in this chapter. I will address research question three in Chapter 5.

To answer research question one, I conducted an initial analysis of the dataset of tweets and coded all instances that include macro-political topics. As was indicated in Chapter 2, I follow the definition put forth by Blase and Blase (2002) for macro-political topics, which includes those political matters relating to local, state or national political issues. This initial scan indicated that superintendents were indeed discussing macro-political topics on Twitter.

Table 2

Tweets Coded as Political

	Men (24)	Women (5)	Unknown (1)
Total Political Tweets	1,429	190	0
Average # of Political Tweets per Participant	59.54	38	0
Political Mean	36.5	3	0

Table 2 illustrates that 1,619 of the 16,658 tweets in the dataset were macro-political in nature. Therefore, 9.7 percent of all tweets in the dataset referenced policy or political matters. Once again, while outside the scope of this study, it is worth noting there appear to be gender differences with respect to political tweeting that warrants further analysis.

The initial coding of political tweets answered my first research question. It has shown that superintendents are, indeed, engaging in macro-political discourse on Twitter. Therefore, it is necessary to proceed to the second research question: What discursive strategies are superintendents employing when discussing macro-political discourse on Twitter?

To answer this question, I conducted a subsequent round of coding that included reading closely only those tweets that had previously been coded as political. After several readings of all tweets, meta-themes began to emerge. It became clear that there were two broad categories of tweets within the dataset: those that were constructed by the individual and those that were distributed content (re-tweets and link sharing). Therefore, a second round of coding was conducted in Nvivo in which all tweets were categorized as either Updates and Conversations or Retweets and Sharing. Updates and Conversations came to represent those instances wherein a superintendent was actively creating new

content, either through sharing an opinion or general information or through dialogue with another individual over Twitter. This type of construction is far more active and consistent with traditional discourse analysis approaches. Those tweets coded as Retweets and Sharing were distinct in that they were recreations of existing content on the internet or Twitter. Both categorizations are worthy of analysis in that both are examples of active construction of text that does something. Therefore, I will address each in turn in the following sections.

Updates and Conversations

Through my analysis, I found two consistent themes that emerged and characterized the political dialogue that superintendents constructed on Twitter: Representations of Engagement and Activism. It is important to note while all of the data presented is publicly available, I made a conscious decision to de-identify the tweets. This decision was made out of respect for the fact that political engagement is traditionally a complex role for the superintendent. I have not de-identified individuals mentioned in the tweets, however, as they are disconnected from the tweet construction itself and are important for the analysis process.

Representations of Engagement

A surprising finding across the entire dataset was how purposeful superintendents were in constructing an image of themselves connected to and acting within the political system. Strategies to accomplish this varied from sharing updates regarding discussions with politicians to tweeting photos of themselves with political actors in political settings. These tweets built an image of the superintendents as engaged in the political system and

functioning as a political actor. For this reason, I have characterized tweets that fit this description as Representations of Engagement.

This finding is very much related to the concept of image management. Nestor-Baker and Hoy (2001) indicated that image management was a characteristic of reputationally successful superintendents. Superintendents are careful in constructing their images as political insiders so as to fulfill their rolls as political strategist, while at the same time recognizing that there might be political ramifications from this engagement. The samples provided below are a small subset, but display common discursive practices constructed in this way. I start with those that specifically represent their Relationships within Politics.

Relationships within politics. Crane (2012) used discourse analysis as a means to examine how individuals utilized the construction of group membership to convey expertise. Building trust and respect by leveraging relationships and group participation is nothing new. When analyzing the dataset for this study, one of the most common features across all participants was the construction of relationships. In some cases, this was done by the superintendent showing that they are within the same room/group as powerful and important people. In other cases, it is through constructing informal dialogues with politicians, which indicates that there is a relationship in place. Such actions serve to place the superintendent within a privileged group, and thereby conveying some form of expertise to him or her. Example 1 does this in a particular way:

Example 1:

1. Gov. Raimondo meeting with RI superintendents asking for input on search for new education commissioner. #NextinEd

The phrase, “asking for input” positions the superintendents involved in the meeting as political advisors. As school leaders, they possess information and expertise that the Governor should listen to in the process of choosing a new education commissioner for the state. This positions the superintendent as the holder of privileged knowledge (Crane, 2012), and thereby reinforces his or her insider status. It may be presumed the Governor addressed other topics in the meeting as well, but the only topic explicitly tweeted about was the fact that the Governor had approached them for input.

Another construction found within Example 1 can be seen across the entire dataset. The political actor mentioned in the tweet is given a position of primary importance by being the first item mentioned. Examples 2-5 prominently display this construction.

Examples 2-5:

*2. Illinois Gov. Rauner talking with suburban superintendents about education in Illinois. [photo]*²

3. Sen. Wiger and Rep. Loon at AMSD. Thanks for supporting education! [photo]

4. Thank you, Governor Dayton, for speaking at AMSD. We appreciate your support of Minnesota students! [photo]

5. Thank you Mr. Speaker for talking with us at the White Bear Chamber event! [photo]

In front-loading the tweet with the political actor, the superintendents have placed the importance of the communication on the individual addressed. Perhaps more importantly, in none of these cases is the actual Twitter handle of the political actors

² Tweets that include photos have been indicated with the tag [photo]. All such indications will include the photo in Appendix D alongside the tweet.

actually used. This is a surprising, but frequent occurrence within the dataset. It would be expected that if the superintendent was intending to communicate directly with the individual mentioned, he or she would include the intended recipient's Twitter handle. This would ensure that the recipient would receive notification of the tweet. Therefore, constructing a tweet directed towards an individual without a handle is a curious construction. It is entirely possible that Twitter handles have been omitted because the subject in question was not a Twitter user, which seems to be the case in some of the examples above. For others, though, the political figure does have an account but it is simply not used.

Another task accomplished by listing names rather than handles is clarity. Stating the political actor's entire name allows the superintendent to be absolutely clear about whom he or she is talking about very clearly. Therefore, it is the act of reaching out and acknowledging the political actor that is given primacy rather than the actual act.

Examples 2 and 5 also overtly include references to discourse. The phrase "talking with" is purposefully in both of these tweets. The inclusion of "with" places the superintendent as a co-creator of the talk. The political figure was not simply talking to, but engaging in conversation about critical issues that confront schools. Such a construction characterizes the superintendent as a political insider who has an avenue to discuss educational issues with policy makers.

The use of the word "thanks" or "thank you" was a common construction across the dataset. In the existing literature regarding social media and discourse analysis, there seems to be very little attention paid to this particular type of construction. Morrow (2006) identified the prevalence of "thanks messages" as they relate to advice seeking on

internet message boards, however I believe that the “thanks” in this context are doing something different. For instance, again, there is no direct link to the political actors’ Twitter accounts, which means the “thanks” may not be intended to actually be seen. Instead, these “thanks messages” may do more to show a transactional relationship. For instance, by placing the superintendent in a position to say “thanks,” he or she must be the recipient of some benefit from the act of the political figure. This further establishes the idea of a relationship between the superintendent and the political figure, whether it is based in reality or not.

Another anomaly that is present in Examples 2-5 is the inclusion of photos depicting the superintendent physically at an event with the political actor(s). This photographic is incredibly powerful in conveying the insider status of the superintendent. He or she is not simply a school official with an opinion, but an active participant within the political world.

There are certainly exemptions to the constructions presented above. There are times when superintendents do rely on Twitter handles within their tweets. Two obvious exceptions to this are Examples six and seven.

Examples 6 & 7:

6. Great meeting today @VaSecofHealth, @yostfordelegate, and our @PulaskiCoSchool partners, discussing early childhood education.

7. Happy birthday @GovernorVA from the great #SWVA...

In Example 6, the superintendent in question names two elected officials by Twitter handle alone. Interestingly, both of these accounts include the officials’ roles within the handle; one does not include the individual’s name at all while the other

acknowledges that the delegate's last name is likely Yost. By using the Twitter handle, it may be assumed that the superintendent intended for the individuals to see the tweet. This example is purely an acknowledgement and thankful communication. As such, it may be more of an act of coalition building and relationship development than anything else.

Example 7 was a particularly unique construction that stood out during data analysis as distinct from any other construction. In this tweet the superintendent addresses the Governor's Twitter handle, indicating a direct comment that he is sending to the addressee. In this case, however, it is highly likely that the Governor actually has a social media account manager who maintains his account, therefore, while ostensibly a direct comment to the person in question, it is likely known that in reality it will not reach it's intended recipient. In addition, the superintendent's wishing of a "Happy birthday" indicates a close connection between the two. Looking through the existing data for this superintendent's Twitter activity, there are no other instances of him wishing individuals happy birthday. Finally, the conclusion of this statement, "from the great #SWVA..." is a reference to a regional branding of Southwest Virginia. It is interesting that the superintendent does not reference his school district in particular, but a geographical region. Given that schools are far less likely to adhere to regionalistic ideologies, but regionalism is incredibly important to political machinery, one may conclude that this tweet is driven from political motivations. Finally, ending the tweet with an ellipses is a unique construction that has no parallel within the dataset; particularly after a hashtag, which is frequently used as a tweet conclusion. The ellipses may indicate that the conversation is not over, giving further credence to the idea that this particular superintendent has an established relationship with the Governor, whether actual or not.

Example 8:

8. Get well soon @GovernorVA, I'm sure the hospital stay is driving you nuts!

The sentiment expressed in Example 7 is recreated by the same superintendent in Example eight. In this case, the superintendent once again wishes good things for the Governor, but follows it up with a personal statement that indicates a strong relationship. For parents and followers of this superintendent, the reality that may be drawn from these tweets is that the superintendent has a very strong relationship with the Governor of the state, which may influence their perceptions and indicate that he is a political player with strong ties within the political system.

Example 9 is an extension of the kind of close connection displayed in Examples 7 and 8. In this example, the superintendent thanks a Representative for a kindness paid to him recently:

Example 9:

9. Thank you @RepJohnKatko for taking the time out of your schedule to reach out when I was in DC yesterday to make sure I was in good shape.

The superintendent not only thanks the Representative for “taking the time out of your schedule,” indicating that the Representative is a busy individual and his engagement was spontaneous and done because of their relationship. Furthermore, the rationale for reaching out is “to make sure I was in good shape,” which indicates that there was no reason for the interaction other than simply as an act of kindness on the part of the Representative to the superintendent. Once again, such a construction creates the perception that there is an established relationship between the superintendent and the

Representative in question, which indicates that the superintendent is a respected figure, and potentially even a colleague, within political circles.

Whether it is participating in a meeting or discussing personal connections to elected officials, the tweets in Examples 1-9 show superintendents constructing images of their relationships with elected officials. Such constructions indicate that they are insiders within the political system and have some standing to either discuss, or possibly influence, the political process at large. For the community members, parents, students, and teachers seeing these interactions the relationships become the primary take away.

Engaged in the process. Not all representations of engagement were necessarily indicative of relationships with particular political actors. In other cases, superintendents shared instances of their work on legislative or policy issues, demonstrating engagement in the political system as an influencer from the outside.

Examples 10-12:

10. I attended a budget workshop today to determine how the Governor's budget proposal will it affect PVSD.

11. Just wrapped up @amsdmn Exec/Legislative Board meeting. Working with districts across metro to position our schools for success in future.

12. Meeting with local supts today about Economic Dev, Legislative changes, budgets, and community partnerships. Future is bright in Wood Co.

In Examples 10, 11 and 12, superintendents present reflective tweets in which they share activities from the day, though it is unknown whether 12 is reflective or anticipatory. In all three of these tweets, however, the superintendent is sharing personal involvement in policy or legislative issues. In Example 10, the author writes “I attended a

budget workshop today to determine how the Governor’s budget proposal will it [sic] affect PVSD”. In this instance, the superintendent is sharing that he/she is proactive in learning how policy issues affect the district and will not simply listen to talking points provided by politicians, but will seek out professional development so that he/she can interpret the impact on his/her own. There is no further information provided as to whether it will affect the district positively or negatively, only that the superintendent is now equipped to make that decision. The omission of the conclusion is curious in this instance, leading the author to the conclusion that the tweet was constructed to further support the superintendent’s role as a content expert rather than making any particular judgment regarding the budget proposal itself.

In Examples 11 and 12, the superintendents share they are working within a group of other superintendents³ to discuss legislative issues. In neither of these tweets are any examples provided or actions to be taken given. Instead, the fact that they are engaged in the process is the subject of the tweet. In essence, updating their followers that they are engaged participants in the legislative process.

It is worth noting that Examples 10-12 are all forward looking. Example 10 is about how the proposal “will affect” PVSD, Example 11 looks to “success in the future,” and Example 12 notes that the “Future is bright.” Such constructions may be rhetorical in nature. They allow for the superintendent to focus on the possibilities that lie ahead rather than the problems that exist currently; a common rhetorical construction within politics.

Example 13 combines elements of Examples 10-12 and Example 1 above.

Example 13:

³ The AMSDMN is the Association of Metropolitan School Districts of Minnesota

13. Mtg w/ legislators in Salem today with @KimStrelchun. TY to legislators Riley, Gallegos & McLain for listening today. [photo]

On the one hand, the superintendent shares that he/she is engaged in the political process to affect change. In this case the superintendent notes he/she and a colleague are meeting with “legislators” at the state capital. Following this, he thanks three specific legislators for “listening” today. The use of the term listening to describe what others were doing indicates that they themselves were there to share their opinion and/or complain about current issues. Where this example diverges from the other three in this set is that it does not indicate solutions were actively being sought, only that things were being shared. Furthermore, like above, the non-use of Twitter handles indicates the tweet may not be constructed for the audience ostensibly addressed in the tweet. This is further reinforced by the fact that a Twitter handle is used to address the superintendent’s colleague “@KimStrelchun.”

The direct thank you to the individuals without the use of Twitter handles is particularly curious. One possible explanation may be that the individuals in question do not participate on Twitter. However, if that is the case, why would superintendents thank an individual on a platform they know they are likely to never see? Perhaps the answer may lie in the fact that someone connected to the individuals will see the tweet and convey the thanks, but that seems to rely on chance far too much. I posit, instead, that the thank you really provided an opportunity for the superintendent to share his/her engagement with the elected officials and to further reinforce they were “listening” to him/her; a reality that further indicates that the superintendent is a political actor engaged in the process.

The 13 tweets provided above display a range of activities wherein superintendents use Twitter to construct images of themselves as engaged within the political structure. Whether that be as a colleague or friend to political actors or an engaged professional providing feedback on policy, the superintendent is politically engaged as a core element of his/her job.

Activism

The above tweets demonstrate that superintendents are engaged in the political process, but do not go so far as advocating for and promoting particular legislative and/or policy choices. As was noted above, historically superintendents have exercised caution with respect to their overt political nature. Instead, as Boyd (1974) noted, school superintendents prefer to rely on nonpolitical resources to accomplish their goals. While many educational leadership standards encourage superintendents to not only understand, but respond to and influence the political, social, economic, legal and cultural context of the school (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2011; The Council of Chief State School Officers, 2015), the need for caution still exists. The advent of associations and various school-oriented interest groups have become their political voice, allowing superintendents to maintain their standing within their local context without alienating members of the board or their community.

The next group of examples focuses almost entirely on school superintendents engaging in discourse about political issues. In general, these tweets may be characterized as advocacy, in that they are explicitly in support or in opposition to particular ideas being discussed in the policy or political realm. The difference between Representations of Engagement and Activism is important. On the one hand, discussing engagement in

the process indicates that the individual is a political player, further developing his/her role as a leader within the community. Activism for issues, however, ties purpose to action. It identifies the issues with which one associates and speaks to where the superintendent places importance in the political dialogue.

Policy topics. In Examples 14 and 15, superintendents use various discursive strategies to discuss policy issues that they hold important.

Examples 14 & 15:

14. Critical thinking, problem-solving, reading & writing skills emphasized by #CommonCore will help prepare students for the SAT #CA4CommonCore

15. Early reports are NDSA Smarter Balanced Assessments have been working flawlessly.... #AprilFoolsday2015 #smile everyone #Keeperspective

Example 14 is one tweet among a series shared by a single superintendent. The content of all of the tweets included sharing either examples from within the school or facts and details about Common Core. At the time of these tweets, Common Core was a highly politicized educational policy issue. Many parents and community members were polarized on the subject because of political narratives that had come to characterize the standards debate. For this particular superintendent, Twitter was a mechanism for sharing the positive aspects of Common Core, not through outright political campaigning, but by making the standards human-focused and showing how they benefit students.

Not every superintendent advocates positively for policy topics. Some use Twitter as a means of criticizing policies. In Example 15, a superintendent references the highly politicized Smarter Balanced Assessment, which was closely linked to the development of Common Core Standards. Rather than posit a cogent argument for his/her dislike of

the test, however, the superintendent uses hashtags as a means of comic relief. Using the hashtag, #AprilFoolsday2015 allowed the superintendent to criticize the roll-out of the Smarter Balanced assessment; an act which not only defines his/her stance on the subject of the test, but also deflects potential criticism that may come to the district from parents and students regarding the testing process.

Examples 16 and 17 are both tweets about public policy issues that directly position the superintendents within a political camp.

Examples 16 & 17:

16. Bad public policy is cured by an engaged citizenry. Are you holding your Rep & Senator accountable for this?
<http://t.co/DTHDZ9Uga4>

17. Glad to hear that #SCOTUS is providing the right of marriage to ALL. I have many happy friends great day to be an American!

In Example 16, the superintendent linked to a news article regarding a charter school not being held accountable for poor performance. The language that is used to describe how to solve such problems is rhetorical in nature. The superintendent states, “Bad public policy is *cured* by an engaged citizenry,” which might indicate that the policy environment is sick or malfunctioning when issues such as those outlined in the article arise. It is the role of the citizenry to get involved in such issues and hold politicians “accountable.” The use of the word “accountable” indicates that the superintendent is suggesting voting repercussions because of the article, not just complaints or discussions. As such, the superintendent is suggesting to his/her followers appropriate voting measures and acting as a political advisor on educational issues.

Example 17 touches on a larger social issue directly influenced by the Supreme Court decision to allow same sex marriage. It is noteworthy that the superintendent does not frame this tweet as a pro-same sex marriage tweet, but as a pro “marriage to ALL.” In doing this, the superintendent clearly takes a stand on a potentially divisive political issue, but does so in a way that will not overtly offend constituents who may disagree with him/her. Such a construction is political by nature and shows a sophistication regarding political topics and navigating community biases, while at the same time having the courage to advocate for causes that matter to him/her.

One of the most frequent policy topics that superintendents shared/discussed on Twitter relates to finances and educational spending.

Example 18 & 19:

- 18. K-12 spending in VA is at pre-recession levels. Delay is denial. If you want a 21st Century Workforce, it's time to invest in our future now*
- 19. State Funding - The Rest of the Story*
<http://t.co/4nBB8yrY9e>

In Example 18, the superintendent made the case that K-12 spending in Virginia is not at an adequate level. His/her reference for adequate is interesting, however, indicating that current spending is at “pre-recession levels.” Given the superintendent’s construction, it is assumed that this is a bad thing, but an interpretation could be posited in which this statement indicates spending is returning to pre-recession levels, which may indicate a recovery. In addition, the superintendent stated, “Delay is denial,” ruling out any potential alternative interpretation. Finally, the superintendent made the leap that funding schools at higher levels will lead to a “21st Century Workforce,” for which there is no evidence provided. In essence, this tweet is an example of a superintendent

advocating for more funding for schools, justifying his position through a data point and linking it to student success and economic benefit.

Example 19 included a link to the superintendents' school blog, where he proceeded to explain the complexity of school funding and where that money goes in schools. The language in this tweet does a couple of important things, first it harkens back for many to the famous radio program host, Paul Harvey. *The Rest of the Story* was a radio show hosted by Harvey and consisted of short stories that provided compelling backstories in an attempt to further illuminate the subject. In referencing this, the superintendent is, in a folksy way, setting the stage to explain the complexity and nuance of school finance.

Another construction found in Example 19, which was certainly present across the dataset, but not a common practice, was the use of a personal blog to provide insight on complex political topics. Rather than try to address the whole of school finance issues within the limit of 140 characters, the superintendent instead used the platform provided by Twitter to direct followers back to his webpage where he could dedicate the necessary time and space to the subject at hand.

In the five examples provided to demonstrate Activism, the superintendents used sophisticated political rhetoric and devices to advocate for causes and issues that were important to them. Those causes may be directly related to outcomes within the school district, but as in the case of Example 17, there are instances where the topics are broader social issues that impact everyone across the community.

On behalf of students. Overall within the dataset, mentions of students (including the words kids, kid, children, child) occur far less within tweets that have been

coded as political as their occurrence in the data set broadly. For instance, the word student(s) is referenced 150 times (9.3% of all tweets) within the tweets labeled as political, whereas it is referenced 4,090 times (24.5% of all tweets) in the complete dataset. The use of the term student(s) in those tweets coded as political are interesting from a discourse perspective, though.

The following six tweets have all been selected because they are representative of tweets that mention students and are political in nature.

Examples 20-21:

20. Terrific MSBA advocates for education meeting with Rep. Kline. Thanks for supporting Minnesota students!
<http://t.co/WvQqhX8kIU>

21. Budget in Enosburg passes by huge voice vote from the floor! Great job supporting students voters of Enosburg!!!! FNESU#

The first thing that is apparent among many of these tweets was the use of the term “student” may be viewed as a rhetorical construction known as synecdoche. Deborah Stone (2002) noted that synecdoches are symbolic representations wherein a part is used to represent the whole. Such linguistic devices are import in “political life because we often make policies based on examples believed to be representative of a larger universe” (p. 138). In Examples 20 and 21, the word “students” accomplishes this task. In both cases, it is posited that voters and politicians are “supporting students.” In actuality, the tasks they are accomplishing support the school as a whole, but students are the more visible part and, frankly, the more persuasive from a rhetorical perspective.

Another important use of the student(s) among the political data set is to position the superintendent as the protector and benefactor of children.

Examples 22-23:

22. Testifying on behalf of all Vermont students! Let's govern and make decisions for Students not for VT adults at the expense of kids

23. Looking forward to defending students and teachers tonight at a public forum in Lyncourt regarding testing and evaluation for schools.

In both Examples 22 and 23, the superintendent clearly places him/herself in a position of working on behalf of students. In Example 22, the superintendent writes, “Testifying on behalf of all Vermont students!” Such a sentiment in essence positions the superintendent as the protector of kids. The superintendent goes on to write, “make decisions for Students not for VT adults,” which is an expression found frequently across the dataset. In essence, this construction posits that students are overlooked because they do not have a voice in the political system. As a result, it is all the more important that the superintendent function as their voice and works on students’ behalf for a fair system.

Example 23 is a slightly different take on a similar construction. Rather than defining him/herself as a protector of students alone, this superintendent claims to be “defending students and teachers.” It is worth noting the use of “defending” conjures images of battle, which is another rhetorical strategy used to position one’s self against another. Regardless, this tweet conforms to the ideological positioning of the previous tweet in that it designates the superintendent as the defender of students and teachers, working on their behalf within a system set up against them.

Finally, students are often positioned as the reason why superintendents do their job and make the difficulties of the political system worthwhile.

Example 24:

24. As @NYGovCuomo and @syracusedotcom beat me up I am reminded by a student why I chose this job... [photo]

In Example 24, the superintendent notes that he/she has suffered in a recent discussion with the Governor and the local newspaper. This tweet shares a photo (which may be seen in the Appendix E) in which a student writes a nice comment about the superintendent. This tweet is complex and does many things. First, as identified in the first section of this analysis, the inclusion of the Governor's twitter account and the newspaper positions the superintendent as an insider within the political system. By noting that these two "beat me up" calls forth battle imagery, as stated earlier, which rhetorically places the educational system in competition with the political system. In this battle, the superintendent is the representative of the school and acts on behalf of students. It is the note left by the student that provides refocusing and encouragement to continue the battle for this superintendent.

In addition, it is interesting to note that the superintendent does use the Governor's and newspaper's actual Twitter handle, indicating that he purposefully wanted them to see the tweet. The tweet is then finished with an ellipsis, which may indicate that the conversation is not over. In many ways, this entire construction could be interpreted as a political positioning with the intention of telling the Governor and newspaper that the superintendent is the defender of kids and the battle is not over.

Retweets and Sharing

Of the 1,619 tweets coded as political, 988 (61%) were ultimately coded as either retweets or link sharing. Link sharing is a Twitter phenomenon in which articles and

resources can be shared directly to Twitter with very little, if any, alterations for the individual tweeting. Many news sources and web browsers include an extension to ease sharing, which auto-populates the text, links, and even hashtags to be tweeted. Similarly, retweeting is a convention in which Twitter users can share previously created content with little to no alteration or input.

While neither link sharing nor retweeting have the same active input as tweets individually composed by the Twitter user, they nevertheless are constructive. After my initial analysis of the dataset I was wary of actually analyzing the discourse presented in the retweets and link sharing. A primary consideration for such wariness is that the actual discourse created was not originally constructed by a superintendent. Nevertheless, the superintendent shared the information and reconstructed it within his or her sphere of influence. Therefore, I believe they do warrant analysis and yield interesting findings.

Critical Commentary

The tone and nature of the tweets coded Retweets and Sharing within this dataset ranged from congratulatory in nature to what might only be characterized as violent. Overall, these tweets were more critical and far more politically charged than the tweets coded as Updates and Conversations. This is not necessarily an unexpected finding. As boyd, Golder, and Lotan (2010) noted, there are a variety of potential reasons why individuals might use retweeting as a convention and narrowing any one reason down is incredibly complex. Nevertheless, retweeting does allow an individual to share a concept or an idea more broadly while at the same time creating some distance between himself or herself and the content of the tweet. Such practice has been immortalized on Twitter in the popular disclaimer, “retweets do not equal endorsements” (Warzel, 2014).

Creating distance on divisive issues. Examples 25 and 26 below are illustrative of superintendents retweeting divisive political statements.

Examples 25-26:

25. RT @acrozier22: More destructive legislation introduced by the Iowa Republicans. Shameful and disappointing. #ialegis #iaedfuture <http://t.co/r4imPr5RVQ>

26. RT @janet4iowa: Hey k-12 parents, Branstad wants you to focus on school calendar as he pitches 3rd worst budget ever for kids #ialegis <http://t.co/m4ODCylbJ7>

Example 25 is a tweet originally created by a superintendent (who was not part of this sample). Subsequently, another superintendent retweeted the tweet and spread the content to a broader audience. This retweet accomplishes many significant things. First, it shares an opinion regarding the legislation being introduced by Iowa Republicans as destructive, shameful, and disappointing. The superintendent is able to convey this message while remaining at arm's length from the actual content. The same superintendent also retweeted an elected official in Example 26. In this case, an elected official is the mouthpiece for a critical statement about the Governor.

While the content of both of these examples are illustrative, and in many ways, more forceful than many of the examples in the Updates and Conversations dataset, the most compelling aspect of these tweets is they are but two of more than 30 political retweets that are very similar in nature. Meanwhile, in my analysis I coded zero instances of political Updates and Conversations for this superintendent. This finding is noteworthy as it indicates that the superintendent seems to be utilizing the resource of retweeting as a strategy for political insulation. Retweeting and Sharing give the superintendent the

proper distance to allow him or her to express an opinion while not taking the full weight of ownership of the opinions.

On multiple occasions superintendents retweeted social commentators who had tweeted potentially divisive statements. For instance, in Example 27 below, a comedian tweeted a joke in which he referred to the Governor of New Jersey as a “loser.” Without a doubt, there is no comparable statement found anywhere within the Updates and Conversations dataset.

Examples 27-29:

27. RT @sub150run: I'm a little upset, I DVR'd The Biggest Loser and it recorded Chris Christie's Presidential campaign speech

28. RT @michaelianblack: As a son of NJ, I support Chris Christie for president of a youth basketball league, but not my country and maybe not the b-ball league.

29. RT @NOTSamCampaign: Brownback and #ksleg have now wasted \$602,000 w/no tax or budget plan... What kind of piano would that have bought?

The very same superintendent also retweeted another comedian in Example 28 that also criticized the Governor and questioned his ability to lead a youth basketball league.

Example 29 is a retweet by a superintendent of an account set up specifically to oppose the agenda of Governor Sam Brownback. In all three of these examples, superintendents are sharing incredibly risky and divisive content. Similar to Examples 25 and 26, the use of retweeting allows superintendents in this case to create a distance between themselves and the information shared, while also tacitly endorsing the content therein.

Insight into Political Beliefs

While politically risky, the content shared in Examples 25 through 29 focused primarily on political commentary. Within the Retweets and Sharing dataset, however, there emerged another form of sharing that was anachronistic to our understanding of strategic nature of the superintendency and the practice displayed in the Updates and Conversations dataset.

Examples 30-31:

30. RT @GameOnKansas: Punish the bullies in the Kansas Legislature before they wreck our schools
<http://t.co/9DVESZn441> via @KCStar #ksleg #ksed

31. RT @Noellerson: Time to lead by Outrage: Speaking out boldly for what one believes about public schools.
<http://aasa.org/content.aspx?id=37153> ...

Examples 30 and 31 both include political calls to action. In Example 30, a superintendent retweeted a political advocate for public schools in Kansas. This particular tweet is laden with evocative discourse. First, the tweet begins with the sentiment, “punish the bullies,” which not only is a call to action to do something detrimental to the legislators, but also evokes the idea of bullies which so many school leaders have taken a strong stance against within schools. This call to violent action is very much outside the norm of what one would expect from a superintendent and there is, in fact, no parallel in the remainder of the dataset.

Likewise, Example 31 is a call to action to “lead by Outrage.” Outrage is anathema to the calm and collected political statesman envisaged by Callahan (1962). In both of these examples, the superintendents who retweeted the statements have a distance

content through the use of retweeting, nevertheless, they have associated themselves with the sentiment.

In some cases, the kind of individuals and organizations retweeted have the potential to link the superintendent to a well-known narrative force as much as any tweet they share.

Examples 32-34:

32. RT @GR8_2B_alive: Chuck Hagel: White House Pressured me to Release Guantanamo Prisoners – Breitbart <http://t.co/Ha8urVglgd>

33. RT @seanhannity: I hope @netanyahu accepts @johnboehner's invitation to address Congress about #Iran. Smart move by Boehner. #Hannity

34. RT @ecucataamount: I am hopeful that we can move in a different direction under Sec. Holcombe's leadership. <Http://t.co/AefVnH1sOh>

Examples 32 through 34 are retweets of individuals or organizations that may be considered politically motivated or divisive. Examples 32 and 33 reference Breitbart News and Sean Hannity respectively. Both of these sources are associated with a populist and nationalist sentiment prevalent within American conservatism (Howley, 2016). Example 34 is politically divergent from the previous two. In this case, the superintendent has retweeted an article published by the educational activist Diane Ravitch, a vocal critic of many of the policies of educational reformers.

In all three examples above, the superintendent has done far more than simply share an idea or a sentiment regarding politics or educational policy. They have, in essence, promulgated the perspective of a political faction and become a de facto

amplifier of the message. Whether intentional or not, the act of retweeting has associated the superintendent with ideas and larger political opinions of the actors in question. It indicates that this is the type of information that might be present within the superintendent's Twitter feed and therefore informing his or her political beliefs.

Ambiguity in Sharing

While coding tweets it became difficult to distinguish between tweets that were the construction of individual superintendents with an included link and those tweets that were simply a headline from an article and the link, and thereby included no construction of the superintendent. Examples 35 and 36 are two cases where such an ambiguity is present.

Examples 35-36:

35. *Our Opinion: Reject Amendment 3; flexibility aids education* <http://t.co/ryU6DY4xS9>

36. *Audit indicts the credibility of Missouri education agency* <http://t.co/jzZHq1IoPr> #moedchat

The tweets coded and analyzed in the Updates and Conversations dataset rarely included such direct language as found in Examples 35 and 36. One important reason is because the discourse found in these two examples are article headlines first and foremost, not tweets. Therefore, they are more direct and serve a very different purpose. However, when shared by a superintendent the language becomes closely associated with the superintendent doing the sharing. A non-social media savvy individual might easily interpret the text of Example 35 to mean that the superintendent, or even the school district, is advocating for the rejection of the amendment in question.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have made the case that there are distinct discursive tasks being accomplished through the use of Twitter by superintendents. The importance in the examples provided above lies not in what the tweets say, but in what they do. That is, each of the tweets construct specific relationships between the superintendents in question and the political landscape that exists outside of the school. For the first 13 examples, coded as Representations of Engagement, the discourse within the tweets positioned the superintendent as a political figure who either works closely with or has close relationships with other political figures. In Examples 14 through 24, coded as Activism, the discourse within the tweets positioned the superintendents as either holding strong political opinions that constituents should listen to or as defenders of students from the political system. Finally, in Examples 25 through 36, the tools of retweeting and link sharing were utilized to amplify particular messages while keeping a distance from the text being shared.

Throughout all of these examples superintendents were defining their roles as political in nature and used Twitter as a medium for sharing with a broad audience, despite the potential risks inherent in discussing politics with their constituents. In order to accomplish this, superintendents have employed discursive techniques, such as synecdoche and rhetorical allusions in order to create a positive narrative.

In the next chapter, I present findings from semi-structured interviews of a purposefully sampled subset of participants. I utilized discourse elicitation methodology to guide our conversations with the tweets analyzed for this portion of the study. In many

ways, the findings from the interviews with superintendents provided compelling arguments in favor of many of the findings presented within this chapter.

CHAPTER 5: DISCOURSE ELICITATION FINDINGS

In this study, I examined the occurrence of macro-political engagement by superintendents on the social media platform Twitter. In order to better understand this emerging practice, I posited three research questions. While research questions one and two were addressed in Chapter 4, in this chapter I will turn my focus to addressing research question three. Specifically, this chapter will address the question, “How do superintendents characterize their own Twitter use for macro-political engagement?”

In the previous chapter, I utilized principles of discourse analysis as a means to understand the constructive nature of macro-political dialogue by superintendents on Twitter. It is important to note that the unit of analysis in discourse analysis is expressly the talk and text itself, not the individual from whom it emanates. To fully answer my third research question, it is necessary to shift the focus of analysis from the text to the individual behind the text. In order to accomplish this, I chose to employ a modified form of the qualitative method known as photo-elicitation methodology, which I have termed discourse elicitation.

This chapter is organized in a manner to first provide clarity regarding the methodology and then to share pertinent findings. I will first present information regarding each of the participants and a brief overview of methodological considerations. I will then provide the primary themes and findings from the semi-structured interviews. Finally, I will provide a summary of findings and the conclusion.

Participants

Following the analysis of discourse from 30 superintendents, I selected 10 superintendents using critical case sampling (Hatch, 2002) for participation in discourse

elicitation interviews. I looked closely at the activity presented during the discourse analysis phase of this study and selected 10 superintendents who were the most active and engaged in the primary themes that emerged from the analysis. Participant recruitment included an email solicitation for participation sent to each superintendent at their district email address. After initial difficulty in recruiting, I broadened the sample frame to include the 20 most engaged participants from within the initial dataset. From this list of 20 individuals, seven superintendents agreed to participate in an interview, six men and one woman. Participants were dispersed across the Midwest and Northeast sections of the country, including New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Minnesota, Vermont, and Virginia. The participants included both new and experienced superintendents. Some participants had moved on to other roles since their inclusion in the dataset, including one who was now a professor of education and one who is serving in an advocacy position for local superintendents. These two non-practicing superintendents were able to reflect back on their roles as superintendents and their Twitter usage, which provided a unique insight.

After participants agreed to be interviewed, each was provided the option of either conducting the interview via Zoom Video Conferencing (<https://zoom.us>) or on Skype (<http://www.skype.com>). A date and time was arranged and I provided each participant with a document that included all of their own tweets coded as political from within the dataset. Each participant was asked to review the dataset prior to our conversation and choose five instances of tweets that they thought characterized their approach to macro-political engagement on Twitter. I purposefully left the definition of ‘political’ vague

because it allowed for a conversation about the nature of political engagement during the interviews.

Methodological Considerations

The decision to utilize discourse elicitation was grounded in the potential that I believe such an approach has for better understanding discursive practice online. The foundation for this choice lies in my interest in applying principles of photo-elicitation methodology to discursive artifacts. Photo-elicitation methodology has shown promise in grounding interviews about specific practice by anchoring conversations in specific instances through the use of photographs (Harper, 2002). I have adapted minor elements of photo-elicitation methodology to incorporate tweets as the point of conversation rather than photographs, but the purpose of the physical object remains the same – it functions as a catalyst for discussion of practice. Therefore, my use of discourse elicitation methodology was not necessarily about analyzing the individual tweets that the superintendents had constructed in the past, but to utilize those instances as a conversational point for a discussion of practice.

As such, interview topics ranged from the role of politics in the superintendency to using Twitter as a platform to increase communication with key stakeholders. An interview protocol was used and may be found in Appendix D, however the semi-structured nature of the conversations allowed for each interview to evolve in its own manner. Oftentimes, the approach that each superintendent took to Twitter would dictate specific conversations that might not be applicable to other participants. The analysis included below is a synthesis of the significant findings across all interviews regarding the role of Twitter in the macro-political discourse of superintendents.

Superintendents as Politicians

All seven participants indicated that politics were a significant aspect of their jobs as superintendents. Furthermore, many acknowledge that not all politics were equal and that their political roles extended beyond their individual communities and could also influence state, or even federal, political conversations. One participant reflected upon her engagement in politics as a superintendent:

In terms of local politics, regionally, state, and even... I mean as I've been in this business longer, on the federal level. So, education is very political in nature, therefore, we have to, I mean we have to in order to be successful.

Despite acknowledging the importance of politics, there was not universal enthusiasm for the topic. In fact, in one case there was an initial hesitancy to even participate in a conversation about politics. One superintendent responded to a request for participation by stating, "I really do not use my Twitter presence for political purposes." In our interview, however, the superintendent openly discussed the political aspect of his tweeting and even noted that there is significant strategy given to the way he interacts with politicians and engages in political topics online. He stated:

If I'm going to be retweeting something our Governor is putting out, or something like that, I will be right on the other side soon, and I'll put something out from a Republican Congressman. I'm very, very calculated when it comes to those types of tweets that I have.

This superintendent's initial response was curious because he was one of the most politically active participants within the dataset. That initial hesitancy may have been a result of the traditional taboos that surround the topic of politics in the superintendency

(Cuban, 1985). Nevertheless, the superintendent actively engaged in the interview and even referenced specific political tweets from his timeline.

For others, there was no hesitation in discussing their political tweeting. In fact, many participants noted that they had a particular affinity for politics outside of their roles as superintendents. For instance, one participant previously held an elected office, which he had to resign upon being hired to lead the school district. Two other superintendents serve in voluntary roles within their state associations that require them to be engaged with politicians on a regular basis. Another superintendent noted that he was a political science major in college and had always had an affinity for politics and the political process.

Despite personal interest in politics, some participants indicated they were not completely prepared for the political nature of the position before taking office. In reference to politics, one participant noted, “it was the area that I was least familiar with as I became a superintendent. But I quickly realized that it was a very important part of the superintendency.” Managing the political nature of the job was something the participants learned while on the job, either through professional organizations, colleagues and mentors, or through practical experience.

All of the participants indicated that they chose to use Twitter as a tool for one of two reasons: (a) to promote their school districts and/or kids, or (b) to connect with a broader professional learning network. None of the participants indicated that political engagement was a primary reason to use Twitter. Furthermore, many superintendents noted that Twitter was “not something that came naturally” to them. Yet one participant noted, that in the future that will likely change with a new generation of school leaders.

“Well, the interesting thing to consider is the new generation of superintendents. They don't know anything different than social media being all-inclusive in their lives.”

Regardless of their preparation or familiarity with social media, all of the superintendents who participated in this study talked about their Twitter usage in quite sophisticated ways. One surprising and compelling finding across all participants was the strategic nature of their engagement with macro-political topics on Twitter.

Strategic Engagement

Strategy was a common theme across all superintendent interviews. Only one participant indicated that strategy was not a significant part of his Twitter usage. In response to a question about strategy, that superintendent said, “Jeez, I wish I did. No, it just looks good. What do you mean strategy? That would mean I actually spent time thinking about it.” While intriguing, this comment was directly contradicted later in the interview when that same superintendent indicated that he had both a professional and personal Twitter account, wherein he would only share some politically touchy topics on his personal account so as not to invite criticism on his superintendent account. This contradiction is indicative of the complex nature of understanding strategy on Twitter. Very rarely is there a fully formed plan used to guide one's Twitter engagement.

Participants indicated that their engagement in macro-political topics online was not something they were taught, but instead learned through practice. Nevertheless, the superintendents I interviewed very much had a strategy and frequently recognized their engagement as such.

When asked if there was a plan regarding political tweeting, one superintendent responded, “Oh 100%, I don't do anything without a plan.” While not every participant

was able to articulate the various components of their strategy for engaging in macro-political discourse on Twitter, in my analysis three distinct strategies emerged: Building Relationships, Building a Case, and Building Awareness.

Building Relationships

Increased politicization of educational issues has required that superintendents recognize their roles as political strategists more fully (Björk & Gurley, 2005). Superintendents must not only understand and follow the legislative process, but also be active players within the political system. As one respondent noted:

We host legislative roundtables for a couple of counties. I'm pretty involved and in constant contact with legislators and their legislative aids. Yeah, I have cell phone numbers for the aides and we text and talk frequently. Hot button topics for sure.

Twitter was recognized as a convenient tool in fostering and building these types of political relationships because of the ease with which one may contact and interact with political figures. All of the participants reflected upon their use of Twitter as a means of reaching out to legislators. One superintendent indicated that he still used Twitter as a means of reaching out to legislators, even though he was certain there likely wouldn't be a response and it was likely an aide running the legislator's account. He said that the most effective way to reach the legislator would likely be through email or their website, yet he still used Twitter as a way of publicly presenting the communication.

One superintendent suggested that he specifically used Twitter as a means of ingratiating himself with legislators, school board members, and the community. He said, "I really think people like to have their picture retweeted out there with something nice

said about them. So its political in that sense. I'm not sure what the technical term is... flattery?" Using Twitter in this way is highly strategic and indicates the superintendent is building political goodwill by increasing politicians' visibility and connection with the school. It was surprising to hear it this way, however, because the superintendent only spoke of the benefit to the individual being tweeted or referenced, but did not speak about the benefit that resulted back to the school or himself from being connected to the politician.

Other superintendents, however, did recognize that there were conceivable negatives to being too closely associated with particular politicians. In order to mitigate potentially detrimental consequences, they undertook strategies to create balance between various political factions so as not to show favoritism or bias.

If I'm going to be retweeting something our Governor is putting out, or something like that, I will be right on the other side soon, and I'll put something out from Republican Congressman Smith. I'm very, very calculated when it comes to those types of tweets that I have.

This strategy indicates the superintendent recognizes that there is as much said in whom he was communicating with on Twitter as there is in what he is tweeting. Therefore, he was cognizant and strategic about the visual appearance of his Twitter activity and what that might be communicating to his stakeholders following his account.

The examples above show that superintendents saw Twitter as a tool for connecting with and developing relationships with politicians. Ultimately, the purpose of this practice is two-fold. First it developed good-will with political leaders who might be able to benefit the district in the future. Second, and perhaps more strategic in nature, it

also showed the superintendent engaged in dialogue with the politician and constructed an image of him or her working for the benefit of the superintendent. This finding is confirmed by one participant who said his Twitter usage showed to his community that he was active in the political world. Whether a true relationship between the superintendent and the politician existed or not matters less than the image created through the engagement.

Building a Case

Participants knew Twitter provided them a megaphone to reach a broad audience of stakeholders quickly. They often saw Twitter as a tool that allowed them to either shape or communicate the stance of the school district. Therefore, they used Twitter strategically to build a case either for or against political issues with their key stakeholders within the community.

For instance, one superintendent discussed the way he leveraged Twitter to shape the discussion within the district about the Common Core State Standards:

When you look at some of the retweets I have... NYSUT is the New York State Teachers Association. And there's been lots to do with the Common Core learning standards recently. And so, what I'll do, I'll pick some tweets from some of the bigger labor organizations in New York or around the nation and I'll retweet those, and that is like shaping the opinion of the school district related to those issues.

In this case, the superintendent utilized the mechanism of a retweet to frame the conversation about Common Core within the district. This participant noted, however, that the act of retweeting was only one part of a larger strategy. He continued, "Then I'll

follow-up with my blog... so it's like I'm seed planting ideas and then they get the whole story on my blog."

For the superintendent above, Twitter became a tool in a larger arsenal of resources being used to shape public and district opinion regarding policy. Other superintendents indicated that they used Twitter less to influence than to share the general stance of the district. For instance, one participant said, "strategically, some of the things I tweet and retweet, um, some of the things, news, and some the things I'll retweet I'm just trying to align with the strategic direction of the district." This sentiment was common across many of the superintendents. For many, Twitter worked very much like a marketing tool to share the district's stance or to promote the good work of the students, teachers and community.

All of the participants noted that their engagement was influenced to some degree by the boards they serve. In some cases, they worked closely with the board to establish the district's stance on policy issues. Twitter was seen as a tool in supporting, reinforcing, and disseminating those policy issues broadly. In other cases, there may not be board consensus and superintendents actively considered the ramifications if they engaged on a topic on which some board members held differing opinions.

One example of this that came up frequently in the interviews was the board's stance on the issue of transgender bathrooms.

We kind of set a clear direction, for example, with the school board or the leadership team, and you want to make sure that you're saying this is where it's important to us and where we stand. If it's not, you know, like for example the gender and the bathrooms and transgender in the bathrooms. We don't have a

school board all on the same page on that right now and that's not something that I'm going to tweet out that we have a specific stance.

The above quote underscores the importance that the political atmosphere plays in censoring or shaping the political activity of superintendents on Twitter. The tweets being shared and constructed by superintendents are highly influenced by the many factors, including the board and the community, and therefore, not a pure representation of the superintendent's individual perspective at all times.

When appropriate, Twitter became a resource in communicating and reinforcing either personal or district perspectives.

Building Awareness

Superintendents often acknowledged that the political nature of their role provided them insights into the political processes and machinations surrounding education policy. For many, this insight created a personal sense of obligation to share with their stakeholders the current state of educational policy in order to clarify what might be a confusing topic. They took their position as the chief educational representative within the community seriously and viewed it as an obligation to be the trusted arbiter of what is best for their students. One participant stated:

Sometimes it's simply information because I've been talking with people and most people aren't following the state legislature and where they are at. I may have been asked questions, and if it's a pretty inane article that's just like where they are at with this. Then there are other times where our school is at, like we had one a couple of years ago when the Governor was wanting to fund early childhood, but he wasn't really funding, but anyways... on the surface level a lot

of people thought it was a good thing, but it was really going to hit school districts in a negative way. Where it would impact other people negatively, so I was putting a lot of things out there to combat the rhetoric coming from our Governor's Office and our Education Commission. So I was retweeting articles and trying to get a different message out there.

In this example, the superintendent recognized that the political framing of the topic might present particular challenges for his district. Simply referring to the Governor's initiative as an early childhood initiative would garner wide support. However, he understood the financial implications and the ramifications the bill would have on existing educational institutions and believed it was his place to inform his community about the other side of this political topic. For him, Twitter became a tool that could easily and quickly disseminate this information.

Participants felt that their tweets were, for the most part, topical and related to the prominent narratives surrounding politics at that point in time. In particular, funding became a prominent topic during legislative sessions. As one participant stated, "the tweets were always topical. During the budget it was about the budget." One superintendent noted while reviewing his Twitter history:

There's a lot of things in here about public policy, like caps, spending caps, and Bill 46, which has to do with declining enrollment and merging school districts together. A lot of my tweets have been around those issues because those are the biggest issues in our state right now. We've lost 30,000 kids in about 15 years, so our enrollment is a real issue.

One participant shared that one topic had evolved into what might only be characterized as a campaign on Twitter. In this case, the superintendent was passionate about the topic of teacher compensation and the negative effects that low compensation had on his home state compared this to his current state, where teacher compensation was increasing. He reflected upon a series of tweets regarding this topic:

“That was one of the first things that just went absolutely regionally ballistic. I mean, usually I get retweets from people around the state that know me, some people automatically retweet me, but that reference 3 and 4, 5 all dealing with, in essence, teacher pay. When that hit and went all across the state... So several of those, they did exactly what I wanted them to do because I wanted to say hey, wake up, because I'm stealing your good people”

In this case, the superintendent was both Building Awareness and Building a Case

It was evident across all interviews that superintendents saw Twitter as a resource that allowed them to make a case for or against particular issues. The strategy employed by participants across the data set was both surprising and intriguing. Each interview included a sophisticated perspective for social media engagement that certainly was never taught, but emerged through various ways. The purposeful nature of their strategic engagement was tempered, however, by the realization that Twitter held the potential to be detrimental to their causes too. This led many participants to express a sense of caution with regard to their Twitter engagement.

Cautious Engagement

While participants recognized Twitter as an avenue for engaging in political discourse with a broader audience, they also recognized that such engagement required

caution. This restraint often led to superintendents picking and choosing the battles they were willing to engage in on Twitter. One superintendent said, “I really think when you've got all kinds of politics out there, if you don't pick your spots you're going to really wind up ticking someone off and that can impact you negatively.” Another superintendent used a fighting analogy to describe his approach to politics on Twitter: “I use more of a boxing mentality and I stick and move.”

Frequently this cautious perspective led to superintendents censoring themselves on Twitter. As one superintendent stated, “I censor myself, not really topics.” Recognition of the broader political landscape within the community was often cited as a reason for superintendents censoring themselves on Twitter. As one superintendent indicated, despite her belief that the Common Core State Standards were ultimately a good thing for her district, the political environment of her community caused her to not touch the topic of Common Core on Twitter because “I knew that there would be some local political backlash for doing so.” This sentiment was echoed by another superintendent who decided in his first year to avoid anything controversial on Twitter because the district had just secured a large bond to build a new school.

It passed by 22 votes. Subject to a recount that an anti-citizens group paid for and a whole bunch of things. So, I've been really cautious not to do anything that's going to be inflammatory. People don't need a reason to vote no on things and I don't want to give them one either.

Another superintendent recognized the importance of censoring himself so as not to alienate key stakeholders, yet often found himself too excited and posting anyway and then scrambling to erase the tweet. “I couldn't resist and I would put something out there.

There was a 90% chance that information would come back down.” This action indicates that the censoring that superintendents engaged in not only occurred proactively, but also retroactively. Furthermore, if this was a common practice across the dataset, there are likely multiple examples of politically risky tweets that were not analyzed through the discourse analysis phase of this study because the superintendent’s feed had been cleaned.

In some cases, what superintendents did not say on Twitter was just as important as what they did say. For instance, one participant indicated that his criticism of politicians was never overt, but if given enough analysis could be understood.

Some of our legislators have not been friends to education, or at least as good of friends as I think they should be. And I don't say anything nasty or tweet about them or anything like that. You can kind of tell, though, if you follow me closely you can tell. That thank you for your service, or someone whose being positive toward education or um, so and so, presenting at, the association of metropolitan school districts. That person hasn't been a friend to education because I didn't thank them for anything. So I mean that's about as judicious as I get. And I don't think that's insulting to anyone or, uh, yeah, that might be insulting if you follow closely.

This particular strategy was unique to this one superintendent and required several follow-up questions for clarity. The superintendent indicated that he used the term “thank you” as an indicator for whether the political actor was a friend of education or not. In essence, he would still recognize politicians with whom he disagreed, but they would not be recognized in the same way as those with whom he had a particular affinity.

Censoring the topics discussed on Twitter on occasion meant leaving issues that may be personally appealing or important to the superintendent behind because it was not appropriate for their role as a superintendent. One participant reflected on this dichotomy:

There are those things that I'll say this isn't worth putting out there because it's just, you know, you're going to have the people that cheer you on for putting it out there and you're going to have the people that you're just going to build barriers with. And if it's something that's not directly related to the work we do in the district, it's, you know what I mean, if it's related at all, and in my job, it doesn't matter if it was a personal.

The superintendent who shared this statement recognized that while Twitter is a place that many feel free to share their personal opinions and beliefs, the fact that his account was directly linked to his role as superintendent meant it was an extension of his role within the district and community. Therefore, the same regulations and constrictions he placed upon himself within the school must also extend to the digital world.

Another participant extended this opinion by noting he had both a professional and a personal Twitter account. Earlier in the conversation he had indicated that “80% of the tweets” go on both accounts, though he did censor some topics that did not belong on his superintendent’s account. In that instance, he noted, “a good example is my stance on legalizing medical marijuana. I keep that off the superintendent account.” Later in the conversation he extended this self-censoring to the topic of LGBT rights:

Okay, well LGBT or gay marriage rules, okay, that's not going on my superintendent account. I'm just not putting it on there. Because I just know that's something that our schools are not dealing with. I know my board, they are just

like, we are not taking on this. But I can deal with that in my own personal account, I can talk about that.

There are many interesting aspects to this particular stance. First, he clearly indicates that he personally has an opinion on the issue at hand but specifically censored himself on his superintendent's account for political reasons. Yet, he is willing to engage in that discussion on his personal account, which is just as public and just as permanent and, as he stated earlier, has 80% of the same content. Another compelling finding from this statement is that it was not necessarily the community or his key stakeholders whom he took into account in censoring the topic. Instead, it was the board for whom he works. Their willingness to engage in that political issue ultimately shaped the kinds of conversations the superintendent was willing to engage in through his political account online, regardless of his own opinions and beliefs.

For other superintendents, however, addressing potentially controversial topics was acceptable if done for the right reasons. On the same issue of LGBT rights, another participant took a vastly different approach.

I don't know if it's around the country, but we have a wear purple day and purple is for LGBT, uh, not even Q anymore, LGBT, and it was right around when the transgender bathroom laws came out in New York state and I had tweeted a few things about wear purple, and stuff like that and I can't remember what year that was... maybe 2013. I don't know. Anyway, I took some negative feedback about that from community members saying they wouldn't have their kids, their kids won't come to school if I'm allowing a girl to use a boy's bathroom and stuff like that. But I think the community has to know where we stand. And as it turns out,

we wound up having enough room for three bathrooms in every building so it became a non-issue, but I think when it first was coming out those were some political tweets that became an issue. And I stood up for my transgender kids, I probably have a half dozen at least, transgender students. and I'm not going to let them get hammered by people and I defended them and took some criticism for it. This superintendent characterized his tweet about “wear purple day” not as a political statement, but a showing of support for a potentially marginalized population within his school. He recognized that there was inherently a political connection to the tweets in question, but regardless he was willing to expend some of his political capital for the defense of his students. This act of standing up for students through political discourse on Twitter was reiterated by multiple participants.

On Behalf of Students

Multiple participants indicated that their roles as superintendents were ultimately focused on achieving “what was best for students.” This sentiment extended to the way they approached political topics on Twitter, leading them to modulate their own opinions so as to not undermine their abilities to serve students. This was directly articulated by one participant, “so I think while I may have a strong opinion about something, I have to temper it in the vain of how I make sure students get what they need.”

In some cases, “what is best for students” served as a litmus test for political engagement by superintendents. One participant reflected this when he said, “I don’t endorse a candidate or things like that. But I will endorse an issue if I think its what’s right for kids.” Another superintendent extended this sentiment, stating:

You know, if there's something that I think is really going to impact kids, I'm probably going to stand up so the community knows where I'm at. And if it's something that I feel really isn't going to impact my parents or my students, or my faculty, I just stay away from it.

If the topic in question did pertain to students, though, superintendents indicated they were very much willing to engage in politically charged conversations on Twitter and willing to take the negative consequences that could accompany it. As noted above, one topic that superintendents indicated they were frequently willing to discuss on Twitter was the issue of LGBT rights. The rationale for this engagement was frequently less about any particular liberal or conservative ideology, but instead a clear belief in their role as an advocate for all students, regardless of background or orientation. One participant articulated this perspective thus:

I took some heat from... my community is very, I'm not going to say very conservative, my community has some conservative people. And to me, you know, I like all students. I don't care where you're coming from, what color you are, if you're gay straight, transgender, I really don't care. You're my student and we're going to help you to be successful.

Differentiating individual superintendent's personal beliefs from their perspectives as superintendents was difficult. In many cases, participants noted their engagement with students really shaped their own personal political opinions and perspectives as much, if not more, than any predefined beliefs they had before entering the field of education. "I look at it from a student perspective when I argue that sometimes. I also feel immigration is also something that's personal interest to me, but I

also think it relates back to students.” Such a perspective grounded the topic of politics in an actual person; a student whom the superintendent felt a specific obligation to stand up for. For the participants in this study, these student obligations led to an increased likelihood of discussing politics because it was not just an awareness or positioning stance.

Image Management

The strategy and consideration dedicated to political discourse on Twitter indicates that superintendents are actively engaged in shaping the image they are constructing of themselves on Twitter. Furthermore, the image they are putting forth is not necessarily a true representation of their own ideological stances, but a subset of their beliefs that fit within the accepted bounds of the superintendency. As one participant noted,

In my job it doesn't matter if it was a personal stance. I'm the superintendent and I think in my role if it's more of a personal stance it's not my place to do that.

Because ultimately, I'm representing the district.

For some superintendents, separating their own political beliefs from their position as a superintendent was difficult. As indicated earlier, nearly all of the participants indicated that they had historically been engaged politically, either as an elected official, an advocate, or as a student. “You know, it's very difficult, or it was very difficult to differentiate myself from politics because I had been part of that world before.” This inherent conflict between personal beliefs and expectations within their role as a superintendent led some participants to express frustration at times of not being able to express fully what they believed on Twitter.

In particular, participants reflected upon both the recent presidential election and the nomination of Betsy DeVos as secretary of education as instances where they had strong opinions and either had to modulate or censor their own beliefs on Twitter. One superintendent indicated that he was cautious about his stance on Betsy DeVos because his board was defining their position and whether they should take a public stance within the community.

And I agree, I don't want her to be appointed, at all. But the board of education thought, even though they all agree, they are going to have a big discussion tomorrow night about whether they want to have a resolution and something they approve that I send out.

Despite this internal contradiction, most of the participants had a single account rather than one personal and one professional. This led to an interesting mix of topics being shared in close proximity to one another. It was not uncommon, while analyzing the original dataset to see a tweet regarding the closing of school because of snow, a tweet about educational policy, and a tweet about American Idol one after another. This intermixing of topics and ideology was recognized by many of the superintendents.

I didn't have a separate superintendents account they were all blended in together. So you might see a tweet about The Clash one minute and then you might see a tweet about Ralph Northam, who was our Lieutenant Governor, who came with some piece of educational research.

While not explicitly expressed by the interview participants, I believe this intermixing of topics is related to the issue of *context collapse*. Marwick and boyd (2011) define context collapse as the process in which social media platforms, such as Twitter,

flatten “multiple audiences into one” (p. 9). The result of this ambiguity is a Twitter feed with multiple potential audiences and a single avenue for communication to those intended audiences. Yet, superintendents were careful to still sanitize their feed of particular topics that might be divisive.

For instance, I'm not ever going to respond on something about, um, abortion or you know, because I try to use mine basically around education and public policy. With the exception of if there is something about the Detroit Tigers or Indiana Hoosiers, my two favorite sports teams, then I weigh in. But I try not to really do a lot... I use mine mostly for education.

Participants discussed a wide range of strategies related to the concept of image management. While none of the superintendents explicitly used the term image management, nearly everything they discussed was related to the concept. From sanitizing their content so as not to offend stakeholders to purposefully standing up for an advocating for topics of interest, their actions were carefully considered and positioned to reinforce the image of themselves they wanted to be seen. The concept of image management is not new (Nestor-Baker & Hoy, 2001), Twitter gives superintendents a new avenue to carefully craft and broadly disseminate their image. While Twitter may have positive outcomes for image management for superintendents, it also has the potential to bring with it negative repercussions. If not carefully crafted, the image put forth on Twitter has the potential to undermine the superintendent's objectives and ultimately could put their jobs at risk.

Summary and Conclusion

The research question posited at the beginning of this chapter was, “How do superintendents characterize their own Twitter use for macro-political engagement?” In the course of this chapter I have provided evidence that superintendents characterize their macro-political engagement on Twitter as strategic in nature and exceedingly purposeful. Participants used Twitter as a tool for engaging key stakeholders and promoting or challenging particular political topics. Above all else, though superintendents grounded their use of Twitter in that it must be relevant to the school district or the students they serve. They took into account various topics, such as the stance of the board, what their engagement might look like to others within the political realm, and how their community and teachers might react to their engagement.

A common finding across the interviews was that superintendents actively sought to differentiate their personal beliefs from their roles as superintendents. There was a clear distinction between the personal ideology and opinions of the superintendent and the political topics that they were willing to discuss. This is pertinent in relation to this study because it is clear that they were cognizant of the role as a superintendent and the way their discourse might either support or undermine the expected behaviors associated with it. In fact, there is reason to believe that some participants saw Twitter as a tool that might allow them to shape their image to the community, thereby actively constructing the perceived role for their stakeholders.

The sophistication with which these participants spoke about their Twitter engagement indicates that there has been, in most cases, considerable thought and planning given to their own engagement. Yet, as a practice within the superintendency,

Twitter usage has been relatively ignored. The findings presented within this chapter indicate that there is an emergent practice worthy of further analysis and, perhaps more importantly, requiring of further consideration within superintendency preparation programs.

In the next chapter I will present the summary, discussion and conclusion to this study. I will reiterate the significance and the methodological components that guided its execution. I will then restate the salient findings across both phases of the study and provide my interpretation of their importance to the practice of the superintendency and the fields theoretical understanding of the position.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSION

In this study I have sought to better understand the evolving nature of the superintendency as it relates to political discourse on Twitter. The fact that superintendents engage in political discourse on Twitter at all might be surprising to some. The existing literature base suggests that superintendents are cautious, and potentially even reluctant, to discuss politics broadly due to historical taboos regarding the role of politics in education (Boyd, 1974; Cuban, 1985). Yet, this study has shown that superintendents are, indeed, engaging in political discourse online. Furthermore, in some cases, superintendents have developed strategies to guide their engagement and have given considerable thought to the messages and ideas they want to communicate through social media.

This chapter provides a review and synthesis of the current study and looks forward to potential next steps. I begin by providing a summary of how the study was designed and conducted. Next, I provide a summary of the key findings from both phases of analysis, synthesizing the core elements that emerged in a section regarding my interpretations of the findings. Finally, I discuss the recommendations for future studies and provide an overview of the limitations relating to this study.

Summary of the Study

This study was designed to better understand an emergent phenomenon within the practice of the superintendency, namely superintendents engaging in political discourse on Twitter. I set forth a conceptual framework in which the principles of role theory were applied to the conceptualizations of the superintendency (see Figure 3).

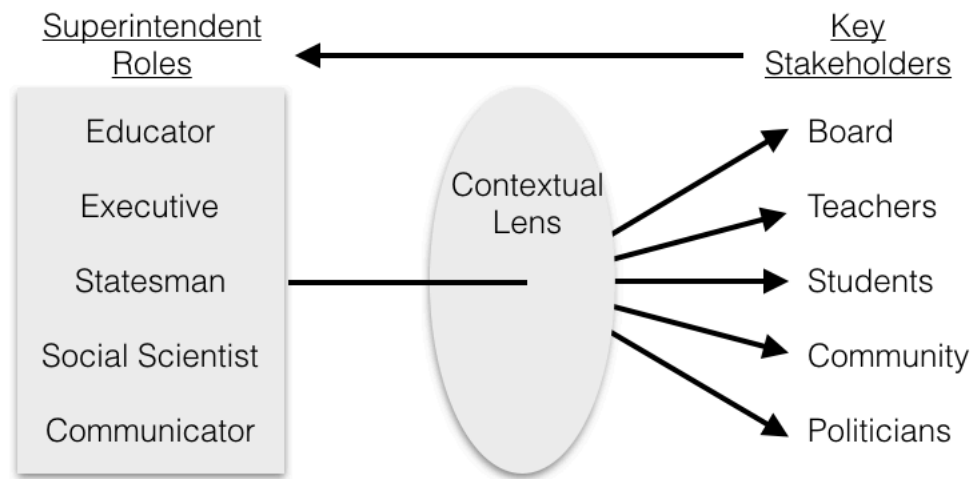


Figure 3. Superintendent Role Manifestation Conceptual Framework. This illustration explains the manner in which expectations influence the performance of roles within the superintendency.

This conceptual framework applies the dramaturgical components of role theory (Biddle, 1979) to the historically situated role conceptualizations of the superintendency (Callahan, 1966; Kowalski, 2005). It posits that superintendents fulfill roles that are largely informed by socially constructed expectations within society. In manifesting these roles, however, superintendents are very much aware of the audience with whom they are interacting. As such, superintendents actively modulate their discourse and actions to suit the environment and audience with whom they are communicating.

It is important to note that this conceptual framework was developed based upon the traditional role manifestation of the superintendency. I posited that this conceptual framework is well-suited for the traditional paradigm of the superintendency, however,

the use of Twitter may be impacting the evolution of superintendent roles, and therefore, worthy of further analysis.

In exploring the role conceptualizations of the superintendency, I noted that the role most closely associated with superintendents' political nature was that of educational statesmen. In reality, however, all of the roles of the superintendency are political in nature. The aim of this study was to better understand that political nature and how it is becoming manifest on Twitter. To guide my inquiry in this subject, I posited three research questions:

- 1) Do superintendents engage in macro-political discourse on Twitter?
- 2) What is the discursive nature of superintendents' macro-political discourse on Twitter?
- 3) How do superintendents characterize their own Twitter use for macro-political engagement?

My approach to answering these questions was guided strongly by the social constructionist orientation that I bring to my research. That is, I hold that cultural norms and collective understanding of ideas are largely constructs established through socially created discourse. Therefore, I sought first to understand the discursive nature of superintendents' discourse on Twitter. To accomplish this, I employed discourse analysis principles established in the methodological approach of discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1992). The discourse analysis phase of the study addressed research questions one and two and included an analysis of 30 superintendents' Twitter feeds between the dates of August 1, 2014 and June 30, 2015. In total, 16,658 tweets were analyzed in this phase and 1,619 tweets were coded as political in nature.

Discourse analysis is a useful methodology to explore emergent discursive practices, but I felt it important to use a different methodological approach to elicit superintendents' perspectives on Twitter usage. Therefore, to answer research question three I chose to build upon the principles of photo-elicitation methodology. Rather than using photos as interview prompts, however, I positioned superintendents' own Twitter history as the image to construct our semi-structured interviews around. In this phase of analysis, I purposefully selected 20 superintendents to participate in one semi-structured interview over the internet. From this sample frame, seven superintendents agreed to participate and were interviewed.

Summary of the Findings

The findings from the discourse analysis and discourse elicitation phases of this study were presented in Chapters 4 and 5. The key findings constructed an image of the modern superintendent as a politically and technologically-savvy leader who actively engages in social media as a way to build and maintain his or her image within the community. In the following section, I will provide a summary of the salient findings from each phase of analysis.

Discourse Analysis

The discourse analysis phase of this study revealed that superintendents were, in fact, engaging in macro-political discourse on Twitter. The discourse in which they were engaged could be divided into two broad themes: Updates and Conversations and Retweets and Sharing. Those tweets categorized as Updates and Conversations included all political tweets that were written and shared from the superintendent in his or her own words. Those coded as Retweets and Sharing were different in that they were

characterized by being the words of someone else, either as a direct retweet or the sharing of a news article headline, being shared and disseminated through the superintendent's Twitter account. I will start by providing an overview of the findings from the discourse analysis phase of this study, beginning with tweets coded as Updates and Conversations

Updates and Conversations. The tweets personally written by superintendents and coded as Updates and Conversations constructed an image of superintendents as political actors and advocates working on behalf of students. One category of these tweets was coded as Representations of Engagement. Representations of Engagement included many examples in which superintendents tweeted updates or images that actively positioned them as political insiders. Examples of this type of tweeting included photographs of the superintendent with politicians, sharing updates regarding political meetings and conversations with politicians, and personal dialogue with politicians over Twitter.

Within Representations of Engagement there were many tweets that constructed the impression that the superintendent knew political actors personally. Examples of this included tweets in which the superintendent discussed conversations that he or she had with the politician, shared photographs of himself or herself with the politician, or publicly shared personal messages, such as "happy birthday" with the politician. Such constructions are important because they assert that the superintendent is not just an outsider to the political process, but has connections with politicians and thereby might be characterized as a politician too.

Regardless of whether an actual relationship exists between the superintendent and the politicians being identified in the tweets, the representation of a relationship is

constructive. The discursive strategies employed to establishing these relationships were often complex and came to be characterized by discursive devices such as front-loading tweets with politicians' Twitter handles, conveying "thanks" as a means of establishing a transactional relationship, and/or inclusion of "with" language to establish co-created talk between the superintendent and a politician.

Another category of tweets that was prevalent among the Updates and Conversations set were those that might be best characterized as Activism. I considered many of these tweets to be Policy Topics because they directly related to policy issues that affect the schools and their ability to educate students. Policy Topics ranged from issues like the Common Core State Standards to educational funding policy. An example of a tweet within this category is "K-12 spending in VA is at pre-recession levels. Delay is denial. If you want a 21st Century Workforce, it's time to invest in our future now." In this example, the superintendent is calling attention to the lack of funding in support of K-12 education and is making a call-to-action to invest in education for the benefit of students. Whether in support or in defiance of particular policies, superintendents made their positions clear and used twitter as a resource to make their case broadly.

Perhaps the most impassioned group of tweets under the categorization of Activism were those that focused specifically on students. I titled this group of tweets as On Behalf of Students because all instances characterized the superintendent as a political warrior fighting the political machine on behalf of students. Examples of this kind of tweeting included "Testifying on behalf of all Vermont students!" or "Looking forward to defending students and teachers tonight at a public forum." In both of these examples, it is presupposed that there is a coordinated attack against students and the superintendency

is positioned in such a way to stand between the policy makers and the children served within the district. Using battle or war language is a common and effective rhetorical strategy within political discourse (Billig, 1996). This is an intriguing finding and indicates that superintendents are not only engaged in macro-political discourse topically, but are even adopting political discursive strategies to further their causes.

Across the Updates and Conversations category, tweets appeared to demonstrate a strategic approach to establishing superintendents as political actors. Superintendents were purposeful in sharing topics and images of themselves engaged in political conversations and contributing to the educational policy dialogue. Furthermore, they used rhetorical strategies, such as battle language, to position themselves as protectors of children from the political process. While clearly political in nature, the tweets coded as Updates and Conversations were strategic in nature and, for the most part, cautious and purposefully constructed to put the superintendent, students, the school districts, and political allies in the best possible light. The same might not be said about the superintendents' engagement in retweeting and link sharing.

Retweets and Sharing. The second broad categorization of tweets within the discourse analysis dataset were coded as Retweets and Sharing. These tweets were unique in that they were not personally constructed by the superintendent in question, but instead were either constructed by another individual or were developed as a headline to an article or blogpost that was shared by the superintendent. From a discourse analysis perspective, this particular construction is intriguing because it is what I might refer to as passive discourse. That is, while the text in question may not have been originally constructed by a superintendent, it was nevertheless passed through his or her Twitter

feed and, thus, eventually constructed in the same discursive sphere as any other text of that superintendent.

The analysis indicated that Retweets and Sharing tended to be more divisive and politically risky than those tweets coded as Updates and Conversations. One potential explanation for this could be the fact that retweeting creates a virtual distance between the content expressed in the tweet and the individual doing the retweeting. While there is an accepted nomenclature of “retweets do not equal endorsements” on Twitter (Warzel, 2014), the fact that tweets were still shared within the superintendents’ Twitter feed has repercussions. The content and ideas are nevertheless associated with the superintendent in question, whether he or she truly believes the ideas or not.

Findings from this analysis indicated that retweeting and sharing articles presented particularly challenging issues for superintendents. First, even though they did not actively construct the text in question, they have associated their accounts with the sentiment, which could be politically challenging. This behavior seemed in opposition to the careful attention that appeared to be given to image creation through the Updates and Conversations dataset. In addition, retweets and sharing had the ability to convey personal opinions of the superintendent outside of the ideals expressed in the tweet. For instance, one superintendent retweeted a potentially controversial news source, Breitbart News, which informs the superintendent’s Twitter followers that he or she consumes news from that source which is a polarizing site that may present political backlash within the district. Regardless of one’s political orientations, some news organizations conform to normative stereotypes and thereby may associate the superintendent in unintended ways.

Another superintendent retweeted an individual who expressed explicit harsh criticism of the Governor of his state. “As a son of NJ, I support Chris Christie for president of a youth basketball league, but not my country and maybe not the b-ball league.” This kind of overt political criticism is atypical of the superintendency, but the construction of a retweet allows for the superintendent to passively give voice to these opinions. This type of politically risky dialogue was not an anomaly, but was seen multiple times across the Retweets and Sharing dataset.

Finally, sharing news articles is a useful mechanism to get researched and compelling information into the public dialogue. It also, however, has the potential to create ambiguity in the superintendent’s feed. Most shared news articles include the headline of the article being tweeted and to many, if not read closely, may be interpreted as the words of the superintendent. In most cases, these headlines were constructed purposefully to gain attention and quickly draw readers into the article. They were certainly not constructed from a superintendent’s perspective and thoughtful of the political ramifications of the discursive choices being put forth. I believe that this is a particularly problematic issue for superintendents as it is analogous to allowing another individual to speak on his or her behalf.

Discourse Elicitation

The discourse elicitation phase of this study was intended to ground the constructive findings from the discourse elicitation phase in practice. Superintendents were presented with their own Twitter history as a prompt to guide semi-structured interviews regarding the practice of macro-political discourses on Twitter. The findings

showed that superintendents were purposeful in their political engagement on Twitter and saw it as a tool to accomplish their strategic goals for the district and students.

The dominant theme that emerged from the interviews was that superintendents characterized their engagement in political discourse on Twitter as strategic. The participants acknowledged their positions were highly political, and as such, they actively thought about their political engagement and the potential ramifications that their views and opinions might elicit. One participant even indicated that he actively planned his retweeting in such a way that it did not convey bias to either Democrats or Republicans.

As part of their strategic engagement, superintendents indicated they worked toward three broad goals in their use of Twitter. First, Twitter became a resource through which the superintendents could build relationships with politicians or political groups. An example of this was one superintendent who would use retweeting or image sharing as a tool to ingratiate himself with politicians; a strategy that he referred to as “flattery.” The relationships cultivated on Twitter had two purposes: (a) it developed political capital with leaders who might be able to benefit the district and students, and (b) it informed the superintendent’s followers that he was working with politicians and getting things done for the district.

A second goal of the superintendents’ strategic use of Twitter was to build a case for or against particular policies. A participant indicated that he would use retweeting of policy-oriented organizations as a way to shape “the opinion of the school district.” Other superintendents indicated that Twitter was a tool to share the district’s stance on specific issues, such as a state policy or a piece of legislation.

The third goal of superintendents' strategic use of Twitter was to build awareness of educational policy issues. Superintendents' saw their position as the leader of the local educational institution as a responsibility to create awareness within their community of the consequences of proposed legislation. For instance, one participant noted that he fought hard against a Governor's proposal to institute universal pre-school. While on the face, this legislation seemed beneficial and had garnered wide support, the superintendent saw downsides. He used Twitter as a tool to share his opinions and link to others to support his arguments that the funding of the pre-school bill would have negative consequences for the school district.

While strategic, most participants also indicated that they were cautious in their engagement and often sought to balance their engagement so that they might not be seen as favoring either Democrats or Republicans. The participants noted that the success of their district could be impacted by making the wrong political move. One participant recalled a referendum that only passed by 22 votes. That experience highlighted for him the fragile nature of his success and he was cautious after that experience to not say anything that may give people a "reason to vote no on things."

One way that superintendents acted upon this caution was to be sure not to share anything political that did not overtly relate to the district or students. In fact, at least one superintendent maintained a separate personal Twitter account where he would engage in discussions of politically risky topics, such as marijuana legalization, but not on his account connected to his role as the superintendent.

Superintendents also indicated that Twitter was used to advocate for policies and actions that would benefit students in their districts. A participant articulated this

perspective when he discussed the political backlash he received within his community after tweeting support of a LGBT rights campaign. He said, “I like all students. I don’t care where you’re coming from, what color you are, if you’re gay, straight, or transgender.” This perspective was shared by multiple participants and indicated that while superintendents were cautious in their engagement on Twitter, they were willing to stand up for their students, even if it might have political ramifications. Therefore, Twitter became a form of advocacy for the superintendents and an extension of their capacity to serve.

Finally, superintendents acknowledged that their personal beliefs were distinct from their professional image that they put forth. They were, in most cases, unwilling to share their personal opinions regarding macro-political topics unless it directly impacted the school or students. This distinction was not as apparent in non-political topics, however. In fact, many participants noted that they had only one account and it would not be uncommon to find them discussing music right alongside issues that were relevant to the school. This intermixing of topics complicates the strategic nature of image creation among superintendents (Nestor-Baker & Hoy, 2001). I speculated that the phenomenon of context collapse (Marwick & boyd, 2011) might be a contributory factor this, wherein superintendents cannot tailor their messages to discrete audiences.

Interpretation of the Findings

I believe this study has shed light on an important aspect of the modern superintendency that has remained largely overlooked. Superintendents are leveraging social media tools, such as Twitter, to engage in political discourse and construct their

image as macro-political actors. These actions seem to represent a continuation of the evolutionary nature of school superintendents' relation to politics.

My interpretation of the findings from this study have synthesized into three key conclusions. First, Twitter presents both opportunities and challenges for image management strategies for superintendents. Second, Twitter is a strategic resource for political engagement that can be both advantageous and detrimental. Finally, Twitter presents a platform that allows for the continued evolution of superintendent roles. I posit that the discursive practices and sentiments expressed during interviews indicate that there may be an evolved role specific to social media engagement - that of an educational statesperson. In the following section I will present my case for each of these conclusions.

Image Management

Nestor-Baker and Hoy (2001) found that superintendents strategically put forth images of themselves to fulfill role expectations within their communities. They referred to superintendents who were able to accomplish this gambit as 'reputationally successful.' The notion of individuals actively shaping their perceived image to fulfill social expectations has its roots in the theory of impression management (Goffman, 1959). While scholars have begun to explore the notion of impression management as it relates to Twitter (Jackson, 2011; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Walden & Parcha, 2017), none have extended this analysis to the role of the superintendent of schools on Twitter. I believe that this study has taken a first step in doing this.

The findings presented in this study have shown that the discursive practice of superintendents on Twitter actively constructs an image of the superintendent as a

political insider working on behalf of students. I have presented multiple examples of superintendents tweeting information that established themselves as either connected personally to politicians or attending meetings and providing input on educational policy issues. These discursive findings were supported by superintendents themselves during the discourse elicitation phase of the study. Superintendents stated that being visibly seen as engaged in the political system reinforced to their teachers and community that they were actively working on behalf of the school district and students.

These findings reinforce that superintendents are actively engaged in image management strategies and Twitter is seen as a tool to reinforce that work. Tweets have the ability to show superintendents engaged in activism, influencing policy, and working collaboratively with lawmakers, all of which fulfill role expectations of the superintendent as a political strategist.

While Twitter is a useful resource for superintendents in image management, there are two important ramifications of its use. First, a complicating factor in the execution of image management on Twitter is the concept of context collapse. Context collapse is a phenomenon related to social media, particularly Twitter, in which multiple audiences are flattened into one (Marwick & boyd, 2011). The open and public nature of Twitter means that for a superintendent, the person reading his or tweet could be a colleague, a politician, a teacher within the district, a student, a friend, or an enemy. Unlike personal, face-to-face engagement, there is no way to isolate messages on Twitter for intended audiences.

The notion of context collapse was confirmed through the discourse elicitation phase of the study. Superintendents indicated that they recognized that there was no way

to target specific messages on Twitter, which required strategic decision making. On some occasions, superintendents avoided macro-political topics that they cared about because they knew that their opinions would likely offend someone and limit their abilities to achieve their goals (such as passing a referendum). On other occasions, superintendents recognized that their engagement might have political ramifications, but they felt so strongly about the topic or idea that they were willing to engage regardless. Typically, superintendents grounded this opinion in the belief that they were doing what was right for students.

A second ramification from the use of Twitter for image management for superintendents is the lack of social expectations connected with the phenomenon. In this study I have posited that the historical development of superintendent roles is closely connected with the concept of role theory (Biddle, 1979). Role theory postulates that social roles are influenced by social expectations and, therefore, the actor of the role is just as influenced by the audience as the audience is by the actor. The phenomenon of superintendents engaging on Twitter is a relatively new phenomenon, however. Very few studies have examined the practice of superintendents' engagement on Twitter broadly (Cho & Jimerson, 2016; Cox & McLeod, 2014; Roth, 2016; Sauers & Richardson, 2015). Therefore, a norm for practice has not been outlined for superintendents. In addition, the very nature of Twitter as a broadcast platform will limit the nature of feedback that they receive regarding practice from their audience.

These findings have required me to reconsider the conceptual framework posited in Chapter 2. Figure 4 is a revised conceptual framework for role manifestation on Twitter.

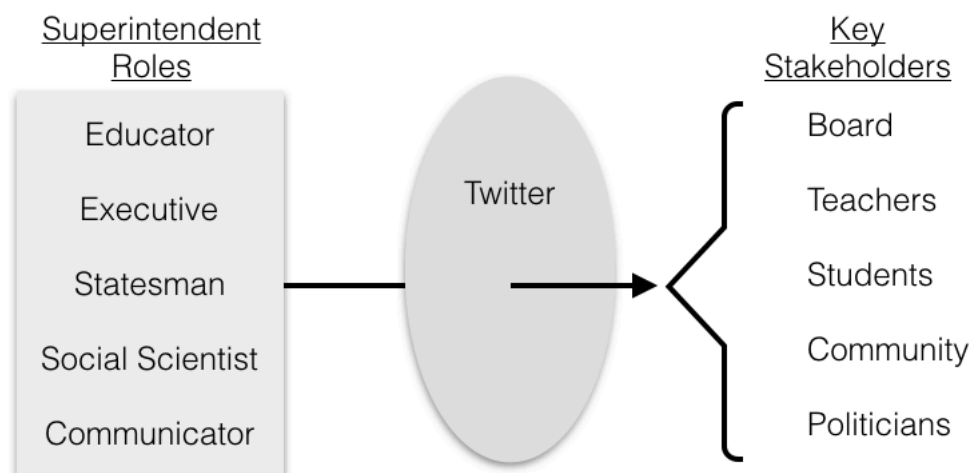


Figure 4. Superintendent Role Manifestation on Twitter Conceptual Framework. This illustration indicates the lack of audience targeting that occurs on Twitter due to the concept of context collapse.

In this revised conceptual framework, the context through which superintendents can filter their engagement is Twitter. This lens presents challenges, however, because the audience is by necessity anyone who follows the superintendent on Twitter. Everything put forth on Twitter will be read by a broad group of stakeholders. This creates a scenario in which all discourse must be constructed for all potential audiences. Another element of this redefined conceptual framework is that there lacks an established expectation for superintendent practice from those key stakeholders. This is important because not all stakeholders hold the same expectations for the political nature of the superintendency. As stated before, there still exists an apolitical myth that many non-educators hold regarding education (Boyd, 1974; Kirst & Wirt, 1997; Land, 2002). For a parent who uses Twitter as a tool to stay abreast of school announcements, seeing a superintendent engage in macro-political conversations may be contradictory to their expectations.

I believe, therefore, that superintendents are actively utilizing Twitter as a resource for image management strategies without established practical frameworks and societal expectations that accompany traditional role manifestations. The superintendents who are using Twitter for this purpose are forging new territory that has significant potential for the development and evolution of the role of superintendency. This study has only scratched the surface of this phenomenon and it is worthy of further examination.

Strategic Engagement

It is easy to view Twitter as an unimportant social media fad where celebrity gossip and political vitriol reside. However, there are many subgroups of individuals using Twitter for a multitude of reasons. Through a search of popular superintendent hashtags and an a priori list developed by Kevin Inman, I identified 570 superintendents that had active Twitter accounts in which the individual specifically identified his or her role as a superintendent in the Twitter profile. From this population, I analyzed a small sample (30) of superintendents' discursive practices online.

The dominant theme across both the discursive analysis and discourse elicitation phases of this study was the word *strategic*. The discourse analysis phase of this study showed that superintendents were strategic about the image of themselves they were constructing online. As indicated in the previous section, I believe the image that superintendents were constructing of themselves on Twitter was purposeful. Therefore, their tweets were not random. Tweets were given consideration as part of a larger strategy regarding superintendents' online and political engagement plan.

This perception was confirmed by multiple superintendents through the discourse elicitation phase of the study. When asked about his Twitter strategy, one participant said, “I don’t do anything without a plan.” Strategy was present across all of the interviews. From the ways superintendents balanced Republican and Democrat perspectives to how they addressed significant policy issues, participants indicated that their Twitter use was just one component in a large plan.

Superintendents also recognized that there are potential negative consequences to their Twitter usage. Multiple participants indicated that the political ramifications of their tweets were a consideration within their strategic engagement. An example of this was one participant who indicated that he publicly supported an LGBT issue on Twitter because he thought it was necessary to support his students. He did receive backlash from his community, but felt the risk was worthwhile because it was in support of students. Another superintendent felt just the opposite; he refused to discuss anything regarding transgender bathroom issues on Twitter because he felt his community was not on the same page as him and he knew there would be difficult political ramifications if he were to step forward on this issue.

Superintendents are less cautious in their retweeting of political topics. Retweeting as a resource on Twitter is a curious construction wherein the content and imagery of the tweet is associated with another individual, but the person who does the retweeting shares the idea further and ultimately has the content linked to his or her feed. While “retweets do not equal endorsements” is a common refrain on Twitter (Warzel, 2014), from a social constructionist perspective, the content of a retweet is doing just as much, if not more, than a traditionally constructed tweet. Therefore, it was interesting to

find superintendents engaging in much riskier political engagement through the use of retweets. The topics shared were much more polarizing, overtly political, and occasionally violent in nature. The act of retweeting is often just the click of a button rather than the construction of a full 140 character message, which may make it more impulsive and less considered. I believe that this is a dangerous practice that could have serious repercussions for superintendents if not employed carefully.

An intriguing aspect of the superintendents' strategic engagement was that these superintendents were never taught strategy for political engagement on social media. These superintendents are very much pioneers on this front and are either extemporaneously developing their own strategy or are applying extant norms from within traditional superintendent engagement. I believe that this is an important development in the evolution of the superintendency and it is incumbent upon educational leadership programs and superintendent professional organizations to recognize the nature of macro-political engagement online and establish resources and tools to guide existing and new superintendents.

From Political Strategist to Educational Statesperson

This study set out to understand the political nature of the superintendency. Callahan's (1966) conceptualization of the role of Educational Statesman formed the foundation for my inquiry into this topic. As noted, however, the term Educational Statesman is problematic on a number of fronts. The term statesman conveys the image of a benevolent, well-respected politician working diligently on behalf of his constituents – someone who is connected to the people he serves, but ultimately separated by social

positioning (Björk & Gurley, 2005). Furthermore, the term statesman has obvious gender problems and does not accurately reflect the nature of the modern superintendency.

Scholars have argued that the political reality of the superintendency is much more local. Superintendents often find themselves engaged in micro-political contexts and remain cautious and reticent to engage in macro-political discussions due to historical taboos and an unwillingness to potentially alienate stakeholders (Kirst & Wirt, 1997). For this reason, scholars have recommended that we conceptualize this role as either superintendents as political strategists (Boyd, 1974; Brunner et al., 2002) or democratic leaders (Björk & Gurley, 2005).

The findings presented in the discourse analysis phase of this study, however, indicate that superintendents are using Twitter in novel ways to construct a sanitized and idealistic image of their engagement in politics. I have indicated that there were two dominant themes that emerged from the Updates and Conversations portion of the discourse analysis phase. Those themes were Relationships Within Politics and Activism. In the former, superintendents used Twitter as a tool to show themselves engaged within the political machinery and as someone who both knows and is trusted by politicians. In the latter, superintendents forcefully defended students and often constructed images of themselves waging battle against politicians and the legislature on behalf of students.

These findings are intriguing because they conform more to the traditional archetype associated with statesmanship than the actual practice of superintendent political engagement as we know it. Furthermore, the practice encompasses many of the various roles of the superintendents as established by Callahan (1966). For instance, the management of the school district was addressed through discussions of financial

management, issues of pedagogy were addressed through advocacy for or against educational policy like Common Core State Standards, and social science topics were addressed through the sharing and interpretation of relevant research and literature relating to educational policy. Twitter has become a platform through which all of the roles and practices of the superintendency may be filtered for public consumption.

Therefore, I posit that superintendents are utilizing Twitter as a tool for image management and constructing their public role as *educational statesperson*. I believe this term more accurately depicts the elevated nature and social justice orientation of the political role superintendents are constructing on Twitter. This does not suggest that any given traditional role of the superintendency is not evident in practice. Instead, I believe that Twitter both allows for and requires a synthesis of various roles (teacher scholar, business executive, political strategist, applied social scientist, and communicator).

Recommendations for Future Research

Twitter is a ripe ground for both quantitative and qualitative research on the superintendency. Many scholars have laid the foundation for much of this work, including Cho (2013), Cox and McLeod (2014), Roth (2016), Sauers and Richardson (2015), and Wang et al. (2016). Much more work needs to be done, however. I believe that this study has begun that work, but there are three specific recommendations I have to extend this research.

Diversity in the superintendency was not a focus of this study, but certainly emerged as a topic that deserves further analysis. Brunner (2002) and Grogan (2000) have laid a foundation for a reconceptualization of the superintendency from a critical feminist perspective. They posit that our understanding of the superintendency is viewed

primarily through a male-centric lens, which influences not only the practice of the superintendency but, ultimately, diversity within the field. As indicated in the participant tables in Chapter 4, female superintendents were included in this research but were a minority. In fact, I had difficulty recruiting female superintendents to take part in the discourse elicitation phase of the study. While six out of the eight male superintendents that I approached for participation agreed, only one out of 12 female superintendents did. The work of Brunner (2002) and Grogan (2000) resonated with me as I reflected on this fact. Did my solicitation for participation frame the study too heavily as a study of macro-politics which may be contradictory to how female superintendents conceptualize their own roles? I believe further research is needed to better understand gendered Twitter use, particularly as it relates to macro-politics. If, indeed, social media is creating a further evolution of the position, this should be better understood through multiple critical lenses.

Another intriguing topic that emerged across the discourse elicitation interviews was the way in which Twitter influenced superintendent communication with students. Nearly every superintendent referenced the exact same phenomenon with respect to their Twitter usage – the night before a potential snow cancellation they would find students reaching out to them asking, or even cajoling them, to cancel school. I find it intriguing that students see Twitter as a tool they can use to engage in one-on-one conversations with superintendents. I hypothesize that this is breaking down traditional hierarchical barriers between school leadership positions and the students they serve. One superintendent indicated this when he said he sees many more students willing to come up and engage him at sporting events because they have talked on Twitter. He felt that before he started using Twitter it was far less common for students to approach him.

Finally, through this study I have posited that traditional superintendent roles are emerging in new and complex ways on Twitter. I have limited my field of analysis only to macro-political engagement. However, I believe there are many other avenues that warrant and need analysis in a similar fashion. For instance, within the sphere of politics, micro-political engagement is a fascinating element of this discussion. I would also argue that superintendents' engagement in professional learning networks are an evolution of their role as Educator Scholar, as well, and provides a compelling avenue of research.

Limitations

While I have attempted to remain cognizant of my own internal biases and perspective as a researcher, there are important limitations to put forth with respect to this study. In the past I have worked professional both within schools and outside of schools in an educational policy subsystem. Undoubtedly, both of these roles have greatly influenced my perspective on the role and nature of superintendent political discourse. Therefore, the conclusions I drew from both the discourse analysis phase and discourse elicitation phases of this study might be interpreted very differently by someone with a different background.

Additionally, the study at hand examined the tweets of 30 school superintendents on Twitter. The initial database that I constructed included 570 superintendents. Therefore, my analysis was conducted on a very small portion of superintendents and may not truly reflect common practice. I attempted to randomize those 30 superintendents and presented findings that were common across all participants, though, if a sample were taken at a different point in time with a different group of superintendents, it is conceivable findings would vary.

Discourse analysis as a methodology is grounded in a personal philosophical positioning. As such, others may interpret discursive practices or implications differently than I. Therefore, I welcome various perspectives on the subject at hand in order to more fully understand the nature of political dialogue by superintendents on Twitter. I believe as social media becomes more ubiquitous and superintendents turn to it as a tool for communicating with parents, teachers, students, and community members, it will continue to be important to fully understand how their usage constructs their identities and roles as modern school superintendents.

Finally, as noted earlier, several superintendents either refused or ignored requests to participate in interviews. This has led me to question whether the findings from the discourse elicitation interviews might be biased toward those superintendents who were already comfortable and willing to discuss politics. I believe the 13 superintendents who chose not to participate may have brought a more contrarian or reserved perspective to the study.

Conclusion

In this chapter I reviewed key findings of the study and put forth my interpretation of those findings. Twitter has had a powerful impact on the way society consumes media, shares information, and communicates. It should not be surprising that as school leaders have begun to turn to Twitter as a resource for discussing educational topics that it might have a powerful impact on their discursive practices and their roles within communities.

In this study, I posited that Twitter has had a power influence on the way superintendents communicate with stakeholders; in essence removing the contextual lens through which they might target information to specific audiences. I also noted that there

is considerable strategy given to superintendents' macro-political engagement on Twitter. In such a risky terrain, superintendents need frameworks and research to guide their macro-political engagement so as to avoid negative ramifications. Finally, I have argued that the macro-political discourse analyzed in this study paints the picture of an evolution of traditional superintendency roles. Superintendents are engaging in all of the traditional roles through the platform of Twitter, but being very careful to construct a statesperson-like image of themselves

Appendix A: IRB Approval



Office of Research Integrity
IRB, RDRC

Initial Review

Approval Ends
January 10, 2018

IRB Number
16-1072-P4S

TO: Todd Hurst
3807 East Tamarron Drive
Bloomington, IN 47408
PI phone #: (317)473-6158

FROM: Chairperson/Vice Chairperson
Non-medical Institutional Review Board (IRB)

SUBJECT: Approval of Protocol Number 16-1072-P4S

DATE: January 11, 2017

On January 11, 2017, the Non-medical Institutional Review Board approved your protocol entitled:

The Superintendent's Feed: An Analysis of Superintendents' Engagement in Political Discourse on Social Media

Approval is effective from January 11, 2017 until January 10, 2018 and extends to any consent/assent form, cover letter, and/or phone script. If applicable, attached is the IRB approved consent/assent document(s) to be used when enrolling subjects. **[Note, subjects can only be enrolled using consent/assent forms which have a valid "IRB Approval" stamp unless special waiver has been obtained from the IRB.]** Prior to the end of this period, you will be sent a Continuation Review Report Form which must be completed and returned to the Office of Research Integrity so that the protocol can be reviewed and approved for the next period.

In implementing the research activities, you are responsible for complying with IRB decisions, conditions and requirements. The research procedures should be implemented as approved in the IRB protocol. It is the principal investigators responsibility to ensure any changes planned for the research are submitted for review and approval by the IRB prior to implementation. Protocol changes made without prior IRB approval to eliminate apparent hazards to the subject(s) should be reported in writing immediately to the IRB. Furthermore, discontinuing a study or completion of a study is considered a change in the protocol's status and therefore the IRB should be promptly notified in writing.

For information describing investigator responsibilities after obtaining IRB approval, download and read the document "PI Guidance to Responsibilities, Qualifications, Records and Documentation of Human Subjects Research" from the Office of Research Integrity's IRB Survival Handbook web page [<http://www.research.uky.edu/ori/IRB-Survival-Handbook.html#PIresponsibilities>]. Additional information regarding IRB review, federal regulations, and institutional policies may be found through ORI's web site [<http://www.research.uky.edu/ori>]. If you have questions, need additional information, or would like a paper copy of the above mentioned document, contact the Office of Research Integrity at (859) 257-9428.

Norm Van Tubergen, PhD/TH

seeblue.

315 Kinkead Hall | Lexington, KY 40506-0057 | P: 859-257-9428 | F: 859-257-8995 | www.research.uky.edu/ori/

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Appendix B: Superintendent Consent

IRB Approved 16-1072
Valid: 1/11/17-1/10/18

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

The Superintendent's Feed: An Analysis of Superintendents' Engagement in Political Discourse on Social Media

WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being invited to take part in a research study about the political discourse of school superintendents in online environments. You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are a school superintendent who uses Twitter as a component of your job. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about 10 people to do so.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

The person in charge of this study is Todd Hurst of University of Kentucky Department of Educational Leadership. Todd is a PhD candidate and is being guided in this research by Dr. Wayne Lewis (*Advisor*).

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

By doing this study, I hope to learn how superintendents see social media, particularly Twitter, as a platform for political engagement. As more school leaders use the platform for professional purposes, discussions of political topics have become more common, which is important to understand from a professional and political perspective.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

All participants will be de-identified in order to disassociate the views and perspectives of the individuals with their professional role. That being said, discussing political topics may be concerning to some school leaders.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The research procedures will be conducted online via Google Hangouts. You will need to come to have an active Google account and be willing to join me online at the specified date and time for one hour

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

The interview will require participants to have internet connectivity and good audio connections. The interview will be recorded and made private for future analysis. Participants will be guided through a semi-structured interview protocol that should last no more than 1 half hour.

In addition, participants will be provided a database of previous tweets and will be asked to identify 5 instances of "political" tweeting. These tweets will form the basis of the interview as we discuss how these examples

Appendix C: Codebook for Discourse Analysis

First Level Codes

Code	Description	Example
Political	Superintendent tweets that referenced politicians, policy organizations, legislation, educational policy, non-educational policy, and politically sensitive topics (e.g., Supreme Court rulings).	“DOE too concerned with keeping initiatives in defined boxes. Need flexibility in the field to produce real results in real time. #cc14”

Second Level Codes

Code	Description	Example
Conversation	Tweets that were either in response to or directed toward another individual.	<i>“Thank you @RepJohnKatko for taking the time out of your schedule to reach out when I was in DC yesterday to make sure I was in good shape.”</i>
Update	Tweets that were not explicitly targeted to an individual but provided a general update on the superintendent’s opinions or activities or the district’s stance on a political topic.	<i>“I attended a budget workshop today to determine how the Governor’s budget proposal will it affect PVSD.”</i>
Retweet	Any instance where a superintendent retweeted another individual’s tweet.	<i>RT @acrozier22: More destructive legislation introduced by the Iowa Republicans. Shameful and disappointing. #ialegis #iaedfuture http://t.co/r4imPr5RVQ</i>

Article	Any instance where a superintendent shared a news article but did not write the main contents of the tweet. Addition of hashtags were included.	<i>Audit indicts the credibility of Missouri education agency</i> http://t.co/jzZHq1IoPr <i>#moedchat</i>
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Appendix D: Discourse Elicitation Interview Protocol

Discourse Elicitation Protocol – Adapted from Hatten, Forin, and Adams (2013)

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. This interview is being conducted as a part of my dissertation on superintendents' use of Twitter for political engagement. This interview will be recorded for transcription purposes, but will not be publicly available and all information provided will be de-identified, including the tweets that you and I discuss today.

If at any time you are not comfortable or want to stop the interview, please let me know immediately and we will cease. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Topic 1: Politics

1. First, please describe to me how you view your role as a superintendent as it relates to politics?
2. Are topics relating to politics of personal interest to you outside of your role as a superintendent.

Topic 2: Twitter

3. Why do you choose to use social media professionally?
4. When you tweet, are there topics that you censor because of your role as a superintendent?

Topic 3: Discourse Elicitation

5. Please describe for me the five tweets that you have chosen for today's interview.
6. What stood out for you in each of these tweets that makes them "political?"

7. What, if any, differences exist between the tweets that I have chosen and the ones that you have chosen?

Conclusion:

8. Do you have any final comments that you would like to include?
9. Do you have any final questions for me?

Thank you for your time and willingness to share your perspective

Appendix E: Tweets

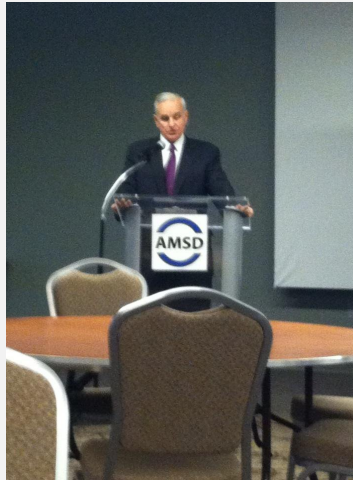
1. Gov. Raimondo meeting with RI superintendents asking for input on search for new education commissioner. #NextinEd
2. Illinois Gov. Rauner talking with suburban superintendents about education in Illinois.



3. Sen. Wiger and Rep. Loon at AMSD. Thanks for supporting education!



4. Thank you, Governor Dayton, for speaking at AMSD. We appreciate your support of Minnesota students!



5. Thank you Mr. Speaker for talking with us at the White Bear Chamber event!

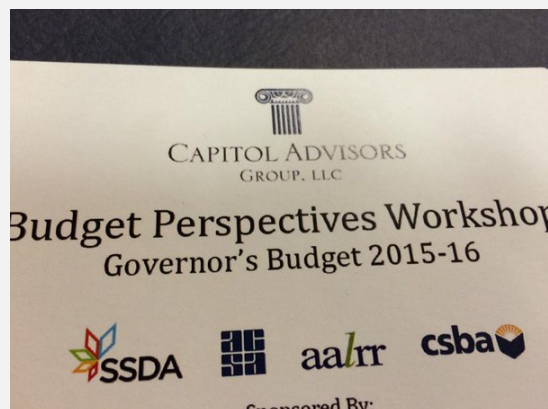


6. Great meeting today @VaSecofHealth, @yostfordelegate, and our @PulaskiCoSchool partners, discussing early childhood education.
7. Happy birthday @GovernorVA from the great #SWVA...
8. Get well soon @GovernorVA, I'm sure the hospital stay is driving you nuts!

9. Thank you to Rep. Fischer, Rep. Daudt, and Sen. Wiger for addressing the White Bear area Chamber of Commerce.



10. I attended a budget workshop today to determine how the Governor's budget proposal will affect PVSD.



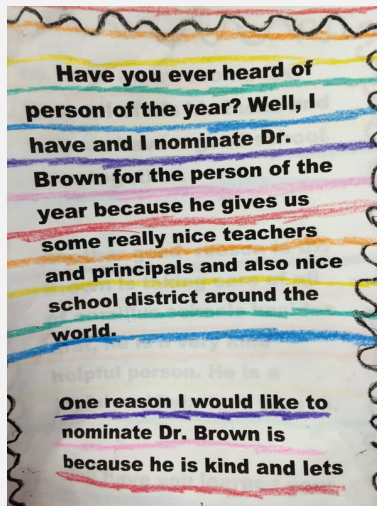
11. Just wrapped up @amsdmn Exec/Legislative Board meeting. Working with districts across metro to position our schools for success in future.
12. Meeting with local supts today about Economic Dev, Legislative changes, budgets, and community partnerships. Future is bright in Wood Co.

13. Mtg w/ legislators in Salem today with @KimStrelchun. TY to legislators Riley, Gallegos & McLain for listening today.



14. Critical thinking, problem-solving, reading & writing skills emphasized by #CommonCore will help prepare students for the SAT #CA4CommonCore
15. Early reports are NDSA Smarter Balanced Assessments have been working flawlessly.... #AprilFoolsday2015 #smile everyone #Keepersperspective
16. Bad public policy is cured by an engaged citizenry. Are you holding your Rep & Senator accountable for this? <http://t.co/DTHDZ9Uga4>
17. Glad to hear that #SCOTUS is providing the right of marriage to ALL. I have many happy friends great day to be an American!
18. K-12 spending in VA is at pre-recession levels. Delay is denial. If you want a 21st Century Workforce, it's time to invest in our future now
19. *State Funding - The Rest of the Story*
<http://t.co/4nBB8yrY9e>
20. Terrific MSBA advocates for education meeting with Rep. Kline. Thanks for supporting Minnesota students! <http://t.co/WvQqhX8kIU>
21. Budget in Enosburg passes by huge voice vote from the floor! Great job supporting students voters of Enosburg!!!! FNESU#
22. Testifying on behalf of all Vermont students! Let's govern and make decisions for Students not for VT adult s at the expense of kids

23. Looking forward to defending students and teachers tonight at a public forum in Lyncourt regarding testing and evaluation for schools.
24. As @NYGovCuomo and @syracusedotcom beat me up I am reminded by a student why I chose this job...



25. RT @acrozier22: More destructive legislation introduced by the Iowa Republicans. Shameful and disappointing. #ialegis #iaedfuture <http://t.co/r4imPr5RVQ>
26. RT @janet4iowa: Hey k-12 parents, Branstad wants you to focus on school calendar as he pitches 3rd worst budget ever for kids #ialegis <http://t.co/m4ODCylbJ7>
27. RT @sub150run: I'm a little upset, I DVR'd The Biggest Loser and it recorded Chris Christie's Presidential campaign speech
28. RT @michaelianblack: As a son of NJ, I support Chris Christie for president of a youth basketball league, but not my country and maybe not the b-ball league.
29. RT @NOTSamCampaign: Brownback and #ksleg have now wasted \$602,000 w/no tax or budget plan... What kind of piano would that have bought?
30. RT @GameOnKansas: Punish the bullies in the Kansas Legislature before they wreck our schools <http://t.co/9DVESZn441> via @KCStar #ksleg #ksed
31. RT @Noellerson: Time to lead by Outrage: Speaking out boldly for what one believes about public schools.

<http://aasa.org/content.aspx?id=37153> ...

32. RT @GR8_2B_alive: Chuck Hagel: White House Pressured me to Release Guantanamo Prisoners – Breitbart <http://t.co/Ha8urVglgd>
33. RT @seanhannity: I hope @netanyahu accepts @johnboehner's invitation to address Congress about #Iran. Smart move by Boehner. #Hannity
34. RT @ecucataamount: I am hopeful that we can move in a different direction under Sec. Holcombe's leadership. <Http://t.co/AefVnH1sOh>
35. Our Opinion: Reject Amendment 3; flexibility aids education <http://t.co/ryU6DY4xS9>
36. Audit indicts the credibility of Missouri education agency <http://t.co/jzZHq1IoPr> #moedchat

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Walden, J. A., & Parcha, J. M. (2017). 'This is a stage': A study of public relations practitioners' imagined online audiences. *Public Relations Review*, 43(1), 145-151.

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Journal of Adolescent Health, 51(1), 53-58.

Todd M. Hurst

Education

University of Indianapolis, Indianapolis, IN

Degree: Master of Arts, 2011

Major: Curriculum and Instruction; Focus: Technology

Ball State University, Muncie, IN

Degree: Bachelor of Arts, 2005

Majors: Classical Cultures, History, and Ancient Greek
Summa Cum Laude

Publications: Editor-Reviewed Book Chapters

Lewis, W. D., & Hurst, T. M. (2016). Schools of choice. In K. Lomotey (Ed.), *People of color in the United States: Contemporary issues in education, work, communities, health, and immigration*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.

Publications: Peer-Refereed Journals

Hurst, T. M. (2017). The discursive construction of superintendent statesmanship on Twitter. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 25, 29.
doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.25.2300>

Research: Electronic Media

Bradley-Levine, J., Romano, G., Perkins, T., & Hurst, T. (2010). *Research report for third-year implementation of New Technology high schools in Indiana*. Indianapolis, IN: University of Indianapolis, Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning. Retrieved from <http://cell.uindy.edu/docs/research/Research3rdyearNTS.pdf>

Presentations: Refereed

Richardson, J. W., McLeod, S., & Hurst, T. (2016, November). Perceptions of educational leadership faculty of open access publishing. Paper presented at meeting of University Council for Educational Administration.

Hurst, T. M. (2016, April). *The discursive construction of democratic leadership by school superintendents on Twitter*. Paper presented at meeting of the American Educational Research Association.

Hurst, T. M. & Hollis, E. T. (2014, November). *A backchannel community: A look into how online educational leadership Ph.D. students communicate*. Presentation at the University Council for Educational Administration.

Hurst, T. M. & Hollis, E. T. (2014, November). *A backchannel community: A look into how online educational leadership Ph.D. students communicate*. Presentation at the University Council for Educational Administration Graduate Summit.

Hurst, T. M. & Gayheart, J. T. (2013, November). *Developing a community of educational technology leadership*. Presentation at the University Council for Educational Administration.

Invited Presentations: Non-Refereed

Hurst, T. M. & Marsh, A. (2014, July). *Align, engage, advance: Indiana Career Council's strategic plan, objective 2*. Presentation at Align, Engage, Advance: Transforming Indiana's Workforce.

Marsh, A. & Hurst, T. M. (2014, June). *Roundtable discussion: Building connections with the business community*. Presentation at the Post-Secondary Counseling Institute.

Hurst, T. M. (2014, March). *CCR initiatives and opportunities*. Presentation at The College Acceleration Network District Leadership Meeting.

Hurst, T. M. (Facilitator) (2013, November). *Indiana's future: Turning challenges into opportunities*. Presentation at the Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning Conference.

Hurst, T. M. (Facilitator) (2013, November). *What's next for STEM in Indiana?* Presentation at the Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning Conference.

Teaching

Adjunct Professor - University of Indianapolis
MBAE 665: School Technology Leadership
EDUC 300: Social, Political & Philosophical Foundations of Education

Grants – Non-Research

Project Lead
Lilly Endowment, Inc. – \$1,800,000

Served as the project lead for the continuation of the Education Workforce Innovation Network (EWIN) at the Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning (CELL) at the University of Indianapolis. The grant established opportunities for school pathway development and statewide education and workforce strategy development.

Professional Experience

College and Career Readiness Panel for the adoption of Indiana State Academic Standards, March-April 2014.

Committee Member - *I-STEM Policy Team* for the development of STEM education policy recommendations for the state of Indiana, August 2014.

Indiana Department of Workforce Development Core Sector Team, January 2017.

Other Activities

School Board Member – Chair - *Indiana College Preparatory Academy*, November 2014 – January 2016.

Honors and Awards

2015 - Participant - David L. Clark Seminar, University of Kentucky
Mentors: Dr. Donald Hackmann and Dr. Diana Pounder

2015 – Participant – William L. Boyd National Politics Workshop
Mentor: Dr. Lance Fusarelli

2003 - Phi Kappa Phi, Ball State University